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KLEATH









Something resembling coquetry crept into her manner. It was
thoroughly charming. Kleath wanted to keep it alive.

KLEATH


BY
MADGE MACBETH

ILLUSTRATED BY
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BOSTON
SMALL, MAYNARD & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

Patrick 86f 4.73



PR 9199.3

M28K56

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(INCORPORATED)

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
Something resembling coquetry crept into her manner. It was thoroughly charming. Kleath wanted to keep it alive. <i>See</i> <i>page 156</i> <i>Frontispiece</i>	
The events of the next few moments always remained a blur to Kleath. <i>See page 21.</i>	176
Meadows's hand fell heavily on her shoulder as she crouched at his bedside	374





KLEATH





KLEATH

CHAPTER I

The "San Domingo" flung wide its noisy and hospitable doors. Tim Meadows, at one end of a huge, grotesque shadow, stood, an invitation rather than an obstruction, in its gaping portals. Tim's expanse of body and expanse of smile proclaimed him the living presentment of an ideal Boniface.

He was a clean-shaven man — once a week. On his florid, round face the map of County Galway was indelibly stamped, albeit somewhat dimmed after thirty years spent under the scorching suns of Southern California, and three amid the blistering winds of the sub-Arctic. He had been in his day stevedore, conductor, freight agent, prospector and miner. But he had discovered that the short cut to men's pockets was by way of their throats, so he came "In" with the rush and a Keg. Meadows knew miners; he was the first to bring wine and women

into Dawson, and his was first and last the most popular dance hall on a street which boasted of nothing else.

In the fast-filling room behind him component parts of every nation under the sun were blended by the alchemy of the Klondike into two classes — miners and girls. From Iceland to Tierra del Fuego men had been lured by gilt-edged tales and had swarmed to match their brute strength against the grim stolidity of Nature, out on the creeks. From Spain to Hawaii girls had learned that the men had gone, and, thanks to Tim Meadows, they had followed the trail to the roughest country God ever made — a country where the cream and the dregs of the world mixed; where under the acid test of hardship Men proved themselves to be but Devils, and Demons to be demi-gods; where Women presently found themselves but flotsam upon Life's merciless current, and those who had been looked upon as Derelicts proved to be Women, after all; a country into which men slunk to lose themselves, into which others came to find themselves — the Yukon!

Although it was past nine o'clock, the Alaskan night drew but a grayish cloak — and drew it slowly — over the heels of the departing day. The Yukon river opposite the "San Domingo" writhed brightly,

like the belly of a huge snake in the sun, and in the distance the brown sails of a boat stood sharply out against the clear blue of the sky.

"Gosh," growled Meadows, giving a hitch to his suspenders, "Oi wisht Oi could lay me pinchers on a noospaper. Seems as if Weatherby was all-fired slow in gettin' our plant a-runnin'. Some day when Oi've made me pile, Oi'm just goin' to set out here all noight, readin' the noos. Seems as if Oi niver could ketch up fer all the toime Oi've lost!"

Meadows had sympathizers, "Old-Timers" who had passed through all phases of newspaperless existence. There was "Big Bill" Buck, the oldest resident of Dawson, who used to bribe a North-West Mounted Policeman to bring him "In" a sheet before the regular, semi-annual mail was delivered. This paper, dead and forgotten to the world outside, was brand new, two months after publication, in Dawson, and with it in his possession, "Big Bill" knew all the sensations of a cub reporter with a scoop. He used to hire a hall in which he sold standing room at "two bits per pair of feet," and, to a capacity audience, he would read the vapid news. Then, there was Sandy McFee, whose practice it was to ride half-way to White Horse and meet the stage, where, with great bravado, he held up Jack Maguire

and took his paper from him, covertly slipping the driver a poke of gold dust in exchange. This transaction being over, Sandy would thunder, like a burly Paul Revere, back to Dawson to copy out the news on a small hand press, and to sell his home-grown product at the modest price of one dollar a copy.

There were "Old Countrymen" who put money on the Derby and who had to wait six months to hear the result of their bettings. There were devotees of the Ring, who, dead-broke, half-starved and expecting a remittance from home, asked first when the mail came in — not for checks, Lord, no! — but the outcome of the Fitzsimmons-Corbett fight!

All these and others joined with Meadows and laid their idle hundreds on the desk of Weatherby, an ex-editor from the East, demanding an up-to-date plant and the publication of a "reel live sheet," which would acquaint the "Outside" with their progress as well as bring the news of the world to Dawson.

"You beat it down to 'Frisco, Editor," Tim Meadows had been deputed spokesman, "an' buy machinery — the best. Git operators an' bring us good ones. We gotta tell folks that we don't live in tents, no more, an' that we come purty near bein' a shure-nuff town. They gotta know we've room an'

welcome fer merchants. Oi'm dead tired of trekkin' to the 'Outside' every toime Oi want a package of toothpicks! An' by the shade av Brian Boru, Editor, people oughta know we run a bank! That'll bring 'em!"

So Weatherby, scarcely realizing how sick he had been for the roar and rattle of the presses, the grime and the smell of eternally-wet ink, "beat it" down to San Francisco and got the best. The machinery was easy, so were the ordinary hand-setters, but securing a linotype operator was difficult. Hours lengthened into days and days into weeks before the editor's search was rewarded, and, to the impatient group waiting in Dawson, it seemed as though their emissary must have forgotten them and their gnawing hunger for news.

Rumor had it, however, that he had returned by the afternoon boat and with him a tall stranger, who, evidently, was ordained to hold some important position in the new plant. Surely, now, said Dawson, there could be no cause for further delay.

Hardly conscious of the gently-lapping water, the scraping of violins and the strum-strum of pianos up and down the street; oblivious to the high-pitched laughter and the scuffle of many feet over polished pine floors, Meadows stood until an unfamiliar

figure, picking his way down the ever-muddy street, caught and held his attention.

"Humph! That's a reel git-to-the-point gait," commented Tim, eyeing the stranger with frank curiosity. "Bet me shur-r-t he's our noo lino-type operator. . . . Bet two shur-r-ts he's some wur-ruker!"

He rolled cheerily down the narrow plank walk and extended a fat hand.

"Howdy, Stranger," he greeted. "What's the good wur-rud from the 'Outside'?"

"Five States in the Union have gone dry," answered the man solemnly, although there was the suspicion of a twinkle in his voice, somewhere.

Tim Meadows's great laugh clattered up and down the street, as, with a thump which nearly dislocated his shoulder, Christopher Kleath was led into the "San Domingo" and straightway to the bar.

"Drinks on me, gents!" roared the proprietor. "Health an' welcome to the stranger!" He conferred out of the corner of his mouth with the object of his generosity, and then added, "Our noo linotype operator. . . . Don't tell me that our noospaper ain't goin' to be some rag!"

The crowd, which, upon Meadows's invitation, had swarmed around the bar like flies around a syrup

jug, presently dispersed with the noise of strong breaths exhaled and the rasping of sleeves across bearded mouths. Kleath replaced the glass which held a mixture of pure alcohol, pure water and cheap whiskey, and which sold for fifty cents, upon the counter, and turned toward his host with a word of thanks. That worthy, however, had received the wireless signal sent him by Ben Tisdale, the faro dealer, and, with an answering sign indicative of coming relief, was already waddling across the room. Tim was a genius at settling disturbances without the spilling of blood, as a rule, and his diplomatic talent was certainly not allowed to grow rusty with disuse.

Left alone, Kleath made a swift survey of his surroundings. A long room flanked the entire length, on one side, by the bar, balanced on the other by tables where cards, roulette and faro were in progress, bounded on one end by the doorway and the other by a low balcony which was divided into small boxes or compartments, and the remaining space given over to the dancers and musicians — such was the appearance of the "San Domingo."

To describe the motley crowd which thronged its precincts would be almost as impossible as to describe each sparkling ripple on the surface of a lake under

the mid-day sun. There was no standard in dress or manner. Some men enjoyed themselves in the conventional garb of merchant or banking house, others drank just as much and danced just as long in the heterogeneous clothing of a mining camp. Some men brought with them a suggestion of refinement — a bit ragged from lack of attention — and others looked frankly upon the glittering scene, flinging ribald jest broadcast and slapping the naked backs of the girls, with exuberant playfulness, which brought tears to their eyes, and caused a crimson spot to glow beneath the powder.

The furious waltz, which had swirled about the room, embracing in its tangled melody a large variety of beautifully hand-painted ladies whom he had as yet found no opportunity to study, came to a deafening end. It was followed immediately by an encore and a rush for the bar. Then Kleath found himself at the mercy of the "rustlers."

A tiny blond atom, who looked as though she should be in a school-room rather than a dance hall, raced across the floor and slipped her powdered arm beneath his, smiling up at him, widely, as though measuring the ability to ingratiate herself by the broadness of her smile.

"He's mine! He's *mine!*" she cried to the other

girls, who had followed her and were trying to claim a share in the attention of the stranger. "He's promised me the next dance! Haven't you?"

Kleath smiled down into the pretty calcimined face pressed against his sleeve, with a feeling of pity. He was moved by something which lay behind the girl's russet-brown eyes. He had frequently seen women who assumed the mask of innocence to cover the sophistication which wrapped them round like a garment, but he had never met a girl who donned a mask of brazenness as a cloak for the childish purity which even her paint could not hide.

"For why de gentleman dance wiz a doll-bebby lak you, Tiny Tess?" inquired a voluptuous brunette in a rich contralto. "You hang lak a leetle bangle on de watch chain . . . hein? An' you dangle on hees middle . . . so!" She swung a well-shaped hand back and forth, pendulum-wise. "When one dances, one has de desire to get hees money's worth . . . hein? One weeshes not to dance wiz a leetle feazzer — one weeshes something to hold in de arm. Now, see, *Signor*, I am tall — I am de bes' dancer in de room . . . I am Maria de Cordova, an' I come from de beautiful Madrid."

Before Kleath could make any reply, a voice wheezed out behind him:

"Here, you — back up! Ba-a-ck up! Madrid, Oi don't think, Mamie! It's Market Street 'Frisco, fer yours! Oi must say, you got your nerve with you. Tim don't allow none av you gur-ruls to pass gold-bricks on strangers the fur-rust thing off the bat."

The speaker was a small man who bore an uncanny resemblance to a shaven ape, and who, with a remarkably handsome woman, joined the group.

"The best dancer in the room!" jeered the latter, displaying an enormous diamond which took the place of one of her eye teeth. "Gawd, but you do just hate yourself, don't you, Mame? Honest, Stranger, when she come here about a year ago, she didn't know a waltz from a' epileptic fit. It was a hoe-down fer hers, er nuthin'."

A roar of laughter somewhat disconcerted Signora de Cordova, who expressed her opinion of the crowd by thrusting out the tip of a very red tongue. Then she turned on her heel and pursued a big Swede who had just entered the room. The other girls, convinced that Kleath was not going to dance, sought more responsive partners at the first squeak of a rollicking polka. The Irishman remained.

"Tenderfoot?" he inquired, with no hint of opprobrium.

Kleath acknowledged his unfamiliarity with the Klondike.

"Ye'll soon get on to the hang av the place," consoled the other. "Oi did. Oi've been all over the wur-ruld," he boasted, "an' nowhere did Oi feel at home quicker than roight here in Dawson. The gur-ruls helped considerable. There's a purty square boonch av' 'em here. They don't flutter round me much now in the avenings because Oi don't carry the price av the dhrinks in me clothes. Not that Oi haven't got it, moind ye, but Oi ain't spendin' quite so free just now. Oi've got quite a lump invisted, East," he confided, "an' Oi'm puttin' me dividinds back into the business. An' Oi've got a claim out on a certain creek where, sor, ye can belave me or not — the wather runs yaller with gold, an' where Oi can take out tails as big as me thoomb!" He measured off an inch on his square and infrequently-manicured thumb.

"You ought to be getting something rather good out of that," commented Kleath, amused.

"Oh, won't Oi, me bye? They don't belave Oi've got it, so Oi don't do much talkin', but you just wait till Oi'm ready to wur-ruk that claim . . . begorra, the gur-ruls will drape thimsilves all over me!"

He closed his eyes in ecstatic anticipation of this prospect, and continued,

"Costs ye wan buck a dance, here at Tim Meadows'. 'Course, there are ch'aper joints, but as Oi've always said, 'The best is none too good fer Barney.'" He jerked his head toward Maria de Cordova, who had at last found a partner. "Ye'll see the gur-ruls lead the min they have lassooed round to Tim afther 'ach dance . . . lastin' but two minutes, moind ye . . . *two* . . . an' Tim'll throw the gur-ruls a blue check. Thin, sor, if they can wheedle the fools to take 'em into wan of thim little gallery boxes an' buy 'em a dhrink, they get another blue check, 'ach wan of 'em riprisintin' fifty cints, sor. Fifty cints! On Saturday noight, it's as foine a soight as ye want to see, watchin' some av the popular gur-ruls cashin' in their checks. There's Lizzie, now — as much as two hundred dollars a wake, sor! Gorra, if Oi had th' money that woman makes — just fer the prisint, ye understand," he hastened to add, "Oi'd — ye don't feel loike a dhrink, Stranger, do ye? Shure, an' the drought seems to be playin' on mesilf somethin' fierce, to-noight!"

Kleath took this delicate hint and bought the man

a drink, then he moved off in the direction of the door.

Meadows, who was as omnipresent as it is given mortal to be, waddled amiably after him.

"Not goin' home?" he cried. "Why, this is the shank av the avenin'! Ye can't be havin' a good toime, at all, at all. No wunder, with that egregious liar, Barney McCool, froze onto ye! Oi'll wager me shur-r-rt that he's already made ye a partner in his bist invistmints, an' has promised ye half of the proceeds from his claim!" Meadows's laugh boomed louder than the noises about him. "But that's no way to initiate a stranger. What ye nade is a thrippin' fairy . . . ain't none av the gur-ruls asked ye to dance?" he broke off, indignantly. "Shure, an' Oi'll call Lizzie. She's the winner av the boonch, accordin' to my way av thinkin'."

Kleath hastily assured his host that the girls had been most attentive, besides which, he had been invited to play poker, roulette and faro. He smiled a little as he confessed himself neither a gambler nor a ladies' man.

"Begorra," answered Tim, "if Oi was a young man with no more avoirdupois than you've got to

carry, Oi'd be out there in the middle av the flure, cuttin' capers with the bist av thim. What's wrong with Lizzie?"

"The woman with the sparkling smile?"

Meadows nodded. "'Diamond Tooth Lizzie,' iverbody calls her. She's about the liveliest party round the 'Hall.' She can dance steady an' dhrink steady through the entoire avenin', an' she turns in twict as many checks av a Saturday noight, as the other gur-ruls. An', Stranger — a tip from me — she's straight, too. Understand? Iver since she got hitched to Bill Lawson, him that met his death at the wrong end of a Derringer last year, Lizzie's been . . . well, anybody that *knows*, knows that they can't sling mud at her! See? Bill give her that sparkler she's wearin' along side av her dimple, an' he left her what remained av his pile, afther takin' her to 'Frisco to get the gleamer sot. Oi don't imagine she has to wur-ruk; but she's lonely, an' just nachelly loikes to have a good toime. Why don't ye have a go with her?"

Meadows was puzzled. The stranger did not seem to care for wine or women, would not be lured into poker, roulette or faro, viewed his surroundings with the curiosity of one unfamiliar with them — and yet, the keen old fox knew human nature well

enough to read a character correctly — Tim Meadows knew that he had met a man.

"Who is the little girl with natural yellow hair?" asked Kleath, showing a sudden interest.

Meadows followed his glance and his manner changed.

"That's me darter, Goldie," he said, shortly.

"I should like to have a dance with her, if you and she will allow me," said Kleath, with the politeness which never failed him.

The proprietor of the "San Domingo" hesitated.

Goldie was permitted to come to the "Hall" only because her parent could keep a watchful eye upon her better there than in the lonely cabin five blocks away. A satisfactory chaperone for motherless Goldie was difficult to secure, and the dangers of leaving her alone were many. She had once been at the mercy of a drunken miner. . . .

Few, however, were the men privileged to dance with her. The interests of business emphasized Tim's adoration for his child; he could not but consider her partners as so much dead wood; they danced at his expense, so to speak. He could hardly allow Goldie to enter the lists with his painted rustlers and demand checks from the men she chose to honor. Not by a damn site! Those who did

claim a dance now and again were, for the most part, lavish spenders at the "San Domingo," and men whose patronage it were best not to lose. Decidedly, she was not to be demanded lightly by any stranger who happened to spend an evening in the "Hall."

Tim looked furtively at the tall, broad-shouldered figure towering above him, at the square-cut jaw and chin showing just the suggestion of a cleft. His glance travelled upward to a pair of clear, gray eyes looking out upon the world with a pleasing mixture of solemnity and whimsical humor so dear to the Irishman's heart. There was also a softness in those eyes when they rested upon women; a bold fearlessness, sometimes a hardness, when they rested upon men. Tim Meadows might have been tempted to ridicule the mop of crisp, curling, sandy hair, which would not lie flat and straight as any self-respecting man's should, had it not surmounted a high forehead which knew but few wrinkles and scarcely ever harbored a frown. Certainly, Kleath was good to look upon, not in the way which appeals so mysteriously to some women, but in a way which men can understand, and which they describe by the use of that flattering and wholly patent observation, "He looks white!"

Meadows was doing some rapid mental work, as he looked. If by keeping Kleath away from Goldie, he could be induced to spend his money on Lizzie, Tess or the other girls, then business demanded that he be kept away from Goldie. But if the women did not appeal to him, if he looked infrequently upon the whiskey when it was amber, if he did not intend to devote his evenings and his good salary to roulette, faro or poker — then, by gosh, he must be a pretty decent sort of guy and one who was fit to dance with Goldie!

“She don’t dhrink,” said Tim.

“No, I judged as much,” returned Kleath, and the father’s decision was made.

As they moved across the room, a man separated himself from the crowd at the bar, and caught Goldie Meadows by the arm. She uttered a startled cry and tried to pull away, but he held her fast, laughing.

Something in his act, something in his manner, made Kleath see red. He dragged Meadows forward and in another moment was conscious that words of introduction were being mumbled by his host. He disregarded a coarse, hairy-backed hand, and grasped the soft and clinging one held out to him. He ignored the man who still kept his hand

on Goldie's arm, and he looked deep into the bluest pools he had ever seen.

"Let me make you acquainted with Duke, yer foreman," insisted Meadows. But Kleath paid no attention. He swung Goldie literally out of the man's arms and into the middle of the floor. Then as the inspiriting strains of a mad two-step got into his blood, he threw back his head and laughed.

The girl looked up at him and smiled, shyly.

"Joe will be awfully mad," she said.

She was right. Duke turned furiously upon his host.

"Are you tryin' to double-cross me with that — curly-haired *cheechaco*?" he demanded.

"This was my dance! If a man can't be sure of fair play in this joint, I know others where he can!"

Tim moved back a step — beyond the radius of a rank, whiskey-laden breath.

"Shure, Joe," he said, "ye're as full av notions as a strawberry av seeds! Whin did Oi iver thry to double-cross wan av the bist fellows in the wur-ruld? An', as fer fair play — Lord, Lord, Joe Duke, what will ye be thinkin' av next? Come along, an' have a dhrop on the house!"

Meadows was bent upon conciliation. Duke was a regular attendant at the "San Domingo," a free

spender, a good hater and a dead shot. It looked like a matter of poor policy to incur his ill-will, even though he was troublesomely fond of Goldie and caused her parent many an uneasy hour. Tim was afraid of neither man nor beast, but he cringed with terror when he thought of the revenge which might be taken upon him through harming Goldie.

"Well," Duke drank with gulps, like the man who takes whiskey for the effect it produces, not the pleasure to his palate, "well, he needn't think he can cut any dash with me, wearin' a white shirt an' creased pants! I'll soon have him wrinkled an' dirty—you can take that from me. No use for these fancy printers! Huh!"

He referred to the black bottle again, and his speech grew thicker.

"I didn't like his looks, at all," he mumbled. Then as a new thought struck him . . . "Say, Tim, did you tell me his name was — 'Kleath'?"

"Christopher Kleath," answered Meadows. "That's the monniker he handed me."

Duke drained his glass and held it high above his head, swaying. The dance came to an abrupt finish with Goldie and her partner but a short distance away.

"Christopher!" jeered the foreman, with a

derisive, drunken laugh. "Christopher Kleath!" he repeated loudly. "*Chris Kleath* in the Yukon. . . . By God, that's — funny!"

And before any one could guess his purpose, he had flung his empty glass, with unerring aim, straight into Kleath's face.

CHAPTER II

The events of the next few moments always remained a blur to Kleath.

The stunning blow . . . the sharp, hot pain which accompanies laceration of the flesh . . . the warm trickle of blood which blinded him, enraged him, made him lust to kill! Women's shrill screams, and the patter of feet as they scampered to a distant part of the "Hall" . . . Goldie's arms clinging about him as she threw herself between him and his assailant . . . something hard that crashed against his fist. . . .

Then out of the crimson mist a thousand hands reached, and they pinned him down while men dragged a heavy, inert body out of the Present, and the sharp commands of a mounted policeman brought a semblance of order out of chaos!

When he opened his eyes, Barney McCool was bending over him, applying, with a great show of jocularly, but, in reality, considerable tenderness, some sticky fluid from a huge brown bottle.

Kleath raised himself to a sitting posture and pushed both man and remedy aside.

"Where —" he began, intensely interested in locating Duke now that no hands pinned him to the floor.

"Ye're in Tim Meadows's factotum sanctorum, so to spake," grinned the little Irishman. "Oi niver knew it to fail — whin thase poognacious *cheechaco* — Tinderfoot, ye know — strangers wake up after a little enforced slumber, they always sez, sez they — 'Where am Oi?' "

"But —" objected Kleath.

Barney pushed him down and continued his ministrations upon cuts and bruises.

"Hoorse liniament," he explained, holding the bottle aloft. "Guaranteed the bist spavin cure on the market! But, begorra, its h'alin' properties know no limit! Whin 'Big Bill' Buck was sheddin' his hair loike a chicken sheds its feathers in moultin' s'ason, he rubbed a dhrop av it on his head, an' would ye look at him now? Couldn't tell him from Samson's blood brother! An' shure, an' that's not all, at all. 'Twiloiight' Toby, him that drives the stage up Bonanza way, was scaled all over with scur-r-vy loike a fish. Three applications cured him, so that he looked loike a pink an' white baby, just

out av its bath, it did! An' moind, Oi'm tellin' ye no lie," ended McCool, fixing his restive audience with a challenging eye.

Kleath struggled to his feet, feeling that he had already risked too much to the influence of the potent fluid, and demanded to know what had become of Duke.

"Shure, an' they put him to roost in the coop," said Barney, indifferently. "They took him up in a shovel afther he ran up against yer fist. But don't ye worry, me bye. Lenny Cavendish, the polace-man, he saw the whole thing, an' he knows who started the throuble. Len's a riferee afther me own heart, he is, an' he niver pinched the wrong man, yet! But a wur-rud av advice . . . don't ye thry to start annything. No wan starts annything now an' gets away with it! Ole Bill Ogilvie's rules . . . yes, sor! No use fer foightin', has Bill. Oi bet me shur-r-t, if he had his way entoire, all the halls, all the gur-ruls and all the 'Oh-Be-Joyful' would be cleared out av Dawson, to-morrer! Iverything's shut up toight on Sunday, as it is . . . ye can't pry yersilf into a game annywhere, with a jimmy, an' ye couldn't get a pint av the craythure no matther if yer mother-in-law died, an' ye felt it incoombent upon ye to have a wake! That's what a Commissioner can

do to a mining town, me bye — ye can take it from wan who has lived an' suffered. But there were Sundays —"

Kleath interrupted.

"Think I'll go to the hotel and turn in," he said.

"An' Oi'll stroll along with ye," volunteered Barney, "it bein' but a sthep further to me cabin. Whist!" he called, as Kleath was making for the door from which the dance hall was reached by a short, dark passage, "if ye've a moind to ch'at the byes out av a look at ye, an' ch'at the gur-ruls out av a chanct to slobber all over ye, an' call ye HEE-RO, let's make our exit, unbeknownst!"

He pointed to a window that gave on a narrow, muddy street at the back of the "Hall." The two men easily negotiated the drop of six feet or so to the ground, and were soon leaving the confused din of thirty-five dance halls in the distance.

Barney strode along silently for a few minutes, as long as he ever remained silent — glancing furtively at his companion's face. The jagged streaks of crimson and the ugly blue blot over one swollen eye did not give it the grotesque appearance one might have supposed. Its chief expression was that of grimness.

"Ye see, me bye," Barney hesitated, as a man will

when he wishes to give good advice to a chap who has not asked for it, and who may express his thanks by means of a violent physical rebuff, "ye see, it's something loike this: The ways av the Frinch Coort whin duellin' was an ancient an' honorable pastoime, an' whin ye got the stage all set fer a foight, are not the ways av the Yukon. To spite Bill Ogilvie, a feller up an' foights, whiniver annybody gets his goat, an' the wan that's left whin the fracas is over, is liable to be the wan who pulls his repeater fur-rust, even though he *does* get reel well acquainted with the 'pen' at New Westminster, afther the funeral ceremonies av his opponent are over! In other wur-ruds, Stranger, kape yer good lamp trained on Joe Duke, fer it's a heap easier to fergive a man ye've fought an' licked, than wan who has fought an' licked you! An' moind, Oi'm givin' ye this tip out av the depths av a lovin' heart, fer it ain't by anny means to me bist interests to do so. Shure, an' Oi'm cuttin' mesilf out av wan foine wake, with you as a beautiful carpse, an' if there's anny place under the sun where Barney McCool comes into his own, it's at a wake, shure as St. Patrick was an Oirishman!"

"Your generosity may yet be rewarded," said Kleath, grimly. "I am not very handy with a gun."

He stopped and lit his pipe, then added, "I can't think what got into the man."

"Two things," returned Barney, sagely. "Wan was a copious supply av Tim Meadows's rotten whiskey, an' the other was something even harder to swallow — yer successful capture av the skur-r-t. Shure, an' Duke is kind av biased, there . . . he is."

Kleath parted from his self-appointed escort (after lending him a dollar) without discussing the subject further. But alone in his room, he puzzled a long time over the reason for Duke's violent exhibition of animosity. He was not satisfied that drunkenness and pique were entirely responsible, for, even though they might account for his attack, they would not explain the enmity and venom more subtly expressed in a derisive harping upon his name.

He searched his past for a satisfactory solution, but found none. Certainly, he had never seen the man; assuredly, he had never heard of him. No memory, however vague, penetrated his consciousness. Yet, that psychic sense which many men deny because they cannot explain and bound it, warned him that Joe Duke was closely linked with his past, and would be more closely linked with his future. . . .

He slept but fitfully, the pain in his eye being intense, and any moments of forgetfulness were hardly less trying, for his mind became a screen across which the events of the night, distorted and intensified, threw themselves with maddening persistence.

Sam Duford, the genial proprietor of the Dawson Arms, who had listened to a highly enthusiastic, though considerably magnified, account of Kleath's victory as detailed by Barney McCool, went to his guest's door on the following morning to make solicitous inquiries.

One glance at the ugly yellowing scars warned him that he had a case for "Doc" Meredith. Within the hour, therefore, Kleath's room looked like the nucleus of a nice little hospital, with the ubiquitous Barney installed as head nurse.

"Well, what do you think of that?" asked the doctor, after slitting open the criss-cross welts, extracting five chunks of glass, and laying them on the table.

"I think I am jolly glad he did not throw a bowl or a pitcher," answered Kleath, with his whimsical solemnity. "But you have not finished, Doctor. I think an excursion with your probe around my eye

will reveal something strange and foreign sticking in the side of it."

Meredith made a wry face.

"Damned nuisance," he grumbled. "Always hated fooling with eyeballs. That's a job for a dyed-in-the-wool specialist. Now, keep still."

"Anny wan who don't loike foolin' with 'igh balls can turn over the job to me," said Barney. "Ye can take this opportunity fer sp'akin', gentlemen . . ." He looked invitingly from one to the other. "Shure, an' Oi'm as empty as a dhrum."

"No breakfast this morning?" asked the doctor, bending over his patient.

"Oi niver touch a dhrop before an operation," declared the Irishman, his finger on the button.

After subjecting Kleath to several excruciatingly painful moments, Dr. Meredith laid a sixth piece of glass on the table with the other souvenirs. It was the merest sliver, but it had penetrated deep into the corner of the eye and its removal was a decidedly ticklish operation, especially as Kleath absolutely refused an anesthetic.

The doctor wiped his probe and drained the glass that Sam Duford gave him. His hand shook a little; it had always been difficult for him to inflict pain, even that relief might follow.

"You are something of a stoic, Old Man," he said, with a strong tang of admiration in his voice. "I should hate to have any one poke about my eye without giving me an anesthetic. In fact, it would be utterly impossible for me to keep still."

Kleath wiped the moisture from his forehead with his hands.

"Oh, I had to keep still," he returned. "Barney was holding me down."

"Shure," said McCool, complacently, from behind his glass; "just loike a sardine could hold down a whale."

"Well, it means a couple of days of darkness for you, Kleath," ordered the doctor, in his most professional tone. "This bandage must not come off until I say the word — hear? It must stay on if Barney and 'Big Bill' Buck, and the police force are required to hold it on. Now, no nonsense, understand, Kleath? I will look in this afternoon. S'long, boys!"

He passed out of the room and went whistling down the corridor, never telling his patient, until long afterward, how desperately afraid he was that blindness was inevitable, in one eye, at least. "Doc" Meredith was one of the whitest men in the

Yukon; one of the men who always whistled most cheerily in the face of the worst calamity.

Barney waited until Sam Duford had gone about the day's business, then he laid his lank arm across the shoulder of the bandaged fellow and said,

"Begorra, but ye can sthand more surgical inconvenience than anny man Oi iver saw — but wan. It was magnificent — sublime — the way ye snapped yer teeth together an' held sthille while 'Doc' chased his little funny-doodle around yer oye! Oi niver seen the b'at av it — but wance —"

Barney could always cap your story with a better one, and he always found the happenings of the present overshadowed by the more thrilling events of the past.

"It was out in the Marquesas, whin Oi an' another feller were doin' a thing or two in cocoanuts. Begorra, me bye, Oi'd hate to tell ye what we cleaned up in wan year — ye'd scarcely belave me! Well, Dinnis O'Flynn — he was Oirish, same as mesilf — met with an accident to his arm, he did. The poor bye had it crushed so that ye couldn't tell what the divil it was, hangin' from his shoulder. An' the pain he suffered —" Barney rolled his eyes and drew in his breath with a whistling noise at a loss for words which would convey an idea of supreme agony.

The story in full occupied the entire morning and seemed to feature Dennis O'Flynn and a man-eating shark with impartial prominence. Kleath was never quite sure whether the Irishman had bitten the shark or whether the shark had done the biting. He took a chance, however, and mumbled something eminently flattering to the character of Mr. O'Flynn.

Barney, expecting the torrent of controversy which his yarns usually called forth, was overpowered by Kleath's unquestioning acceptance of the story. His admiration and affection for the plucky stranger rose to limitless dimensions. "Here is a man," thought the little Irishman, "Oi can entertain without fear of havin' oaths flung at me an' at me ancestors, to say nothing av violance bein' done to me unoffendin' person."

He prefaced his departure by inviting Kleath to become a partner in his many financial enterprises, and borrowed a dollar against the payment of his long-expected dividends.

That fight was a matter of considerable expense. Most of male Dawson called to relieve the tedium of the patient's convalescence, and most of the visitors suffered from a sympathetic moisture of the eye but a corresponding dryness of the throat.

One afternoon Kleath heard a curiously light foot-

step in the corridor and was surprised when a half-timid tap sounded upon his door. The unmistakable and inimitable rustle of feminine garments brought him to his feet.

"May I come in, Mr. Kleath?" and, suiting the action to the word, a woman entered the room and closed the door behind her.

Kleath turned his bandaged eyes toward the speaker and made a clumsy, groping step forward. It was as though he played a serious game of "Blind Man's Buff"—a game he had always hated—and he was conscious of horrible embarrassment at being just then under the critical scrutiny of a strange woman.

"I'm Mrs. Meredith, the doctor's wife," the soft, drawling voice went on, "and I just ran in to see if there was not something a sympathetic woman-creature could do for you. Men, when ill, are so helpless."

She advanced and took his hand in an ungloved clasp. He received the impression that she was a tall woman.

"Awfully good of you," stammered Kleath, "awfully."

Never in his life had he felt at so trying a disadvantage. He was uncertain as to the neatness of his

own appearance; he was only too certain of the appearance of his room, which he knew looked far more like a hotel bar than the habitation of a semi-invalid. At the moment he could not remember whether the Jap had made his bed, but he pictured its disorder after Barney McCool had made it his resting place throughout the morning.

"Awfully good of you, Mrs. Meredith," he said again. Then, waving his hand expressively toward the litter on the table, "I wonder — if you would — if I dare ask you — to sit down?"

A low gurgle of laughter answered him.

"I am already sitting down, you poor blind dear," she said, "for I have decided to make you a real visit. I will even go so far as to read poetry to you, if you like, although, personally, I would choose almost any other form of entertainment. You see, Frank told me about you several days ago, and asked me to come to see you. But I reminded him that my forte is not 'district nursing.' Sick people are so depressing, don't you think so? And besides, I didn't think you were really nice. Frank is so indiscriminate in his tastes; he likes everybody. This afternoon, however, I had absolutely nothing to do, so I decided to come. If you had been awfully sick and depressing, if you had been horrid in any way,

I should have shouted at you from the door and run. But *voilà*, here I am! "

She smiled brilliantly, before realizing that her exhibition was wasted.

"Bereft of my sight, I am not too blind to see your flattering implication," answered Kleath, rising to the occasion. "I must regret, however, that for the moment, you, too, are not sitting in darkness. I wish that some kindly shadow might spread itself over the disorder of this room. I can but faintly guess what it is."

"A perfect pigpen!" She spoke as though she made a little *moue*. "And smoke so dense, that, from here, I can hardly distinguish your outline. Truly! which reminds me — may I have a cigarette? Thanks!" The silence was broken by the sound of a scraping match. "There! Now I don't notice it so much. . . . What was I saying? Oh, yes, your room. . . . Well, I know the sort of plague that has visited you. An illness, a mild, unctagious illness, I mean, is a regular bonanza to the men, out here, and a natural disinclination for being ruined by treating solicitous friends has cured many a man, where Frank's pills and plasters have failed! I must use my influence, and get him to release you soon, or else —" a sudden thought seemed to strike her —

"or else, we will just move you out to our house."

The rate at which intimacy progressed in the Yukon amazed Kleath. Grateful though he was for the kindness of heart which prompted this invitation, it cannot be denied that such impulsiveness almost bewildered him. It had the effect of driving him further into his shell than a more leisured advance would have done. A conservative man himself, slow to like, slower to dislike, he could not understand the hurricane gusts of feeling which prompted Clare Meredith to love or hate at sight; to give and suddenly to snatch away; to laud and to defame almost in the same breath. He could not know that she had come to see him largely out of curiosity combined with utter boredom, and that she had quite expected to find him a disappointing mediocrity. Neither did he realize what it meant to her, when she found him anything but a mediocrity. Without knowing it, his refusal was almost ungracious in its finality, in its impersonal tone. As a matter of fact, he was still suffering from a state of mental awkwardness and was ill at ease.

"Oh, very well! Very well!" Disappointment was concealed by a cloak of mockery. "You need not come. We won't kidnap you, or anything of

that sort. Only, I think you are an ungrateful man, who does not recognize a blessing when he sees one — modestly meaning me. . . . Oh, I forgot!" She leaned forward and patted his hand. "You poor thing, you can't see! Well, never mind. I forgive you, and, to prove it, I will feed you sandwiches which I made myself. Oyada is not to be trusted with chicken, even though it is potted."

She rustled a paper, tantalizingly, then suddenly thrust something deliciously dainty into Kleath's mouth.

His thanks were adequate and his enjoyment keen. But if he had known what those sandwiches and the subsequent luxuries brought by Clare Meredith meant, in a place whose hospital cheerfully paid one dollar each for all the fresh eggs it could obtain, his embarrassment would have choked him.

He listened to her inconsequential chatter with sincere gratitude toward her for coming, and was ashamed at not finding greater pleasure in the memory she left and keener anticipation in her promise to return.

But any shortcoming on his part was amply counterbalanced by the enthusiasm of Barney McCool. He tore himself out of Kleath's room with greatest difficulty each day as the hour for Clare's

visit drew near, and he shamelessly lurked around the corner of the corridor to get a glimpse of her as she swept past.

"The loveliest lady in the Yukon comin' here smoothin' yer fevered brow an' takin' yer timperature daily!" he sighed with envy. "Begorra, but the gods have favored ye, Christopher Kleath! Ye come here, an' the fur-rust noight av yer arrival, what do ye do? Walk off with Tim Meadows's darter, an' poonch Joe Duke almost into Abraham's boosom! An' ye get yersilf so cut up in the fracas that lovely female Dawson comes knockin' at yer dure with bokays, an' cows' feet jelly! Now look at me. . . . Oi niver had anny luck at all, at all. Shure, if Oi got sick, it'd be off in some place loike the Marquesas where there'd be only a man-eatin' shark fer a docthor, an' no ladies at all, at all. No ministerin' angels fer poor Barney McCool!"

He refreshed himself from a flask and continued darkly,

"But just ye wait, Christopher Kleath, till Oi commence to wur-ruk me claim. Shure, an' Oi'll have to surround mesilf with the whole av the polace foorce, entoire, to kape the wimmen off — God bless 'em! Just ye wait! An' Oi've made ye me partner, loike, too — don't be forgettin' that! The wur-rud

av Barney McCool is as good as another man's poke av dust — an' that's no lie! "

Kleath was not greatly surprised to hear a gentle knock at his door on the following morning, but he was astonished to hear the voice of Goldie Meadows, not Clare Meredith.

He was alone, Barney having just repaired to the bar for his breakfast, yet he was conscious of a delightful freedom from embarrassment and restraint. The thought flashed through his mind that he was becoming rapidly inured to women visiting him in his room. In reality his relief from awkwardness was due to the fact that there was about Goldie a simple directness, a lack of artificiality and coquetry which made her seem more like a child than a girl of nineteen — a girl who had always looked upon men as brothers, not lovers.

She was so different from her surroundings. That difference was not a describable thing, patent as it was. She seemed to have lived outside her often sordid world; to be untouched and unspattered by the splashes of mud thrown by people wallowing in the scum of Life's puddles.

"Dad brought me over," she said by way of greeting, as she took his hand and gave it a quick,

strong pressure in a man's frank way. "He had some business at the bank and is going to call for me in a few minutes. He's terribly anxious about you and wants to see for himself how you are getting on."

Kleath expressed himself flattered at Meadows's interest in his accident.

Goldie's vivid blush was wasted, for he could not see it. Neither did he divine her embarrassment as she picked up a towel from the floor, where Barney had thrown it, and shook it out with several sharp flirts.

"Well, you see," she said, "it isn't just because you got hurt that Dad's worrying. He will be here himself in a minute, and — and — I thought you might not understand him. He's really worrying awfully about the newspaper."

Kleath burst out laughing, and Goldie, relieved at having made so successful an opening for her father, went on,

"I am glad you are not offended. You couldn't be, if you knew Dad. No one can realize how he has longed for his paper. He has roughed it ever since I can remember — in the California camps, mostly — but he could always get the news. Here

he's been for nearly three years with never a paper fresher than six months, and now that one is almost within his reach — well, he can hardly wait."

There was a hint of wistfulness in her tone, which made Kleath ask,

"And will a newspaper reconcile you to living forever in Dawson? Shouldn't you like to go somewhere else — say to San Francisco or one of the other big cities?"

"I don't know," answered the girl, simply. "I only know the life of the camps and here, and I like this better than the camps. The woods are so lonely at night, I used to think I should die if I could not hear voices. Still, it is pretty rough at times in the 'Hall.' . . . But," her voice dropped to a tone of shy confidence, "I have always thought I would like to live somewhere, in the South maybe, where I could have a garden, where ever and ever so many things would grow, and where I could sit among the flowers for more than six weeks out of every year."

"I like puttering around a garden, too," he said. "We used to have a lovely one when I was a youngster. Since the doctor has stood over me with a probe in one hand and a glass eye in the other, and I have been unable to see the pictures of the present, I have amused myself by conjuring up the prettiest

ones of the past, and my favorite is that of our garden. My mother and I just about lived in it before I went off to school, and the look of it and the scent of it come back to me vividly, even now."

"What did you grow?" asked Goldie.

"Oh, pretty much everything. People might call it a hodge-podge, now, because there was little enough system or scientific arrangement in our work. We just planted the things we loved and tended them carefully. Any old dried stick would grow for my mother. There are people who have that knack with flowers, you know. We had hollyhocks, and geraniums, and sweetpeas, and nasturtiums, and roses and wild columbine, and lilies-of-the-valley, and oh — the carnations!"

"What are carnations?" demanded Goldie, her cheeks flushed and her eyes shining.

And Kleath tried to explain. But for months the only idea she had was that of a giant clove, sprinkled with other spice, and colored fantastically with a ragged, red, white or pink frilly petticoat!

They were still talking flowers when the seamanly roll of a heavy body in the corridor announced the coming of Timothy Meadows.

"Oi've just seen 'Doc,'" he complained, "an' he sez that accordin' to the looks av yer peepers, yes-

terday, he's goin' to kape thim blinders on fer another wake. Dog-gone such foolishness, Oi sez. If the man can see, he can, sez Oi; if he can't, thim blinders ain't goin' to give him his soight, annyhow."

"Oh, Dad," protested Goldie, "don't talk like that. Mr. Kleath might believe you! You know you wouldn't want him to run any risk, just for the sake of a few more days of rest."

"Oi didn't say Oi wanted to wish annything on annybody," grumbled Meadows. "But Oi do wish some wan could head straight fer that noospaper office an' start the sheet."

"Do you mean to say that they haven't got it runnin', yet?" asked Kleath, solemnly.

"Runnin'?" echoed the other. "Naw! They ain't even got it walkin'! Weatherby knows just about as much about setting up a press as Oi do about makin' Frinch chiny, an' the other byes who were so all-fired smart before the machinery come — they don't know the top from the bottom. So with you an' Duke laid up —"

"Oh, yes . . . how is my noble assailant?" asked Kleath, interrupting.

Meadows muttered something which sounded like free transportation for Duke's soul to a place far removed from the chill of the Yukon, and said,

"The swellin' on his face ain't subsidin' quicker than Noah's flood, an' it'll take a heap more'n forty days fer him to see an olive branch, too! Just think that over fer a whoile, Stranger, an' don't be stheppin' on his toes whin ye meet. As fer the plant, there ain't a man in the whole wur-ruks that knows annything at all, at all, about machinery. They're a lot of farmers! An' Weatherby a-sittin' at his desk, writin' editorials by the dozen, an' gatherin' in the noos without a Lord's blessed way to get the stuff in print. . . . Why, damn it, it's enough to make a saint swear."

And to prove his equality with the canonized characters of the religious past, Meadows spun a picturesquely profane monologue for about a minute and a half.

Goldie remained indulgently silent. Her attitude was such as one assumes to a small child in the tantrums, although she said, when he stopped to catch his breath,

"Shame, Dad! You know how I hate swearing!"

Meadows threw an awkward arm about her shoulders by way of apology.

"Oi say, darter," he asked, "what do ye know about compresses?"

She looked at him and then at the bandaged man, who thought that he, too, divined what was coming.

"I know what 'Doc' taught me when we were taking care of Ben Tisdale. Why?"

"Because he said something about gettin' this feller's eye an' face patched up a little quicker, if he could have cold compresses kept on 'em. Oi was wunderin'—"

"But I would not think of allowing your daughter to take so much trouble," broke in Kleath, hurriedly. "If Dr. Meredith thinks it really necessary, I could go to the hospital, or I suppose McCool would not mind helping me."

Meadows bridled. It was one thing for a man to demand favors of Goldie; it was quite another thing for him to refuse them from her! It was like refusing the command of Royalty, begorra! He had hesitated to offer her services as he had hesitated to introduce Kleath to her. But the same intuitive trust in, and liking for, the man, prevailed in both cases. No dowager cherished higher ambitions for her débutante daughter than did Tim Meadows for his motherless girl; no doting aristocrat discouraged the advances of undesirable suitors with more discrimination or finality. Upon the men with whom Goldie came in contact, he kept a

suspiciously vigilant eye. Few girls were more carefully shielded; few girls' futures were more conscientiously considered. For his child's sake, and hers alone, Meadows persevered in a business he had grown to loathe, for he could make money faster in it than in any other that he knew, and Goldie must have a fortune when she went away to the "Outside" to be a Great Lady. She had lacked many other things, Tim Meadows realized, but money and the position which could be bought with money, she should have!

There were times, however, when looking over his precincts, cluttered with human vermin, he felt that he would like to feed them all to wild beasts in order to rid Goldie of her surroundings. Oh, he had dreams for her future . . . he had such fragrantly rosy dreams. . . .

Having offered her services to Christopher Kleath, then, he would jolly well see that they were not refused. Besides, his magnanimity was somewhat tempered by his hunger for the long-delayed newspaper.

"Necessary?" he mocked. "Who said they were absolutely necessary? Whiskey ain't necessary to men, but it's damn good to have now an' again."

Kleath's protests were blusteringly brushed aside,

and it was arranged that Goldie spend her mornings in an endeavor to speed the recovery of the invalid, and to bring light not only to the blind, but to Dawson and its environs in the form of the *Yukon World*.

The benefit Kleath received during the following week was nothing in comparison to that which Goldie derived from her daily visits. Her vision suddenly broadened and she saw far beyond the restricted limits of the Yukon. She became familiar with much that was great and good in the mysterious "Outside" of which men talked and of which she had but vaguely dreamed. She travelled by sunny paths and spacious highways into clean and noble places, and she saw a world which was, to her, like fairyland. Kleath took her on these excursions gallantly, as by a train de luxe. They sped away from an atmosphere of saloons and gambling dens and dance halls. And she forgot that even in the beautiful "Outside" there is an alley behind every highway, a hovel behind every castle.

Sometimes they played at school when she plied him with questions as an eager pupil plies a teacher. They had lessons in geography, history, literature and art. He made of her mind a sort of magician's hat into which all manner of familiar objects were

poured — her opinion of “This and That.” Then he added a word, a phrase, a quotation, and behold — he plucked out strangely beautiful things which literally dumfounded her, and she could not possibly believe him when he told her they had been there all the time, hiding under the lining of that particularly amazing hat!

To her he seemed to possess all the wisdom of the “Three Men from the East”—and considerably more.

He loaned her books and discussed them with her, and he laughed immoderately when she timidly asked,

“You are a great scholar, aren’t you, Mr. Kleath?”

His chivalry toward her was something she treasured like a jewel. It was an unconscious incentive to reach upward to its level, and Goldie never left Kleath’s presence without feeling that she should carry herself as befitted a duchess. That intuition, which rarely fails a woman, showed her the difference between the spurious and the genuine — between refinement and a thin veneer of culture, and, in striving after one and avoiding the other, she followed, for the first time in her life, a conscious ideal.

One morning at the very end of the week, when

Goldie's soft fingers pressed a welcome coldness against his head, Kleath heard a swift step in the corridor, and in another moment Clare Meredith stood inside the room.

"Oh!" she said, sharply, and he felt the tension tighten like a band, "oh! I had not heard of your engaging a companion. Pray forgive my intrusion."

The offensive implication was unmistakable; she classed Goldie with Tim Meadows's rustlers.

"It will cause you no inconvenience now," she continued, "to dispense with my small services. Good morning!"

She closed the door with an angry click and passed down the hall much more swiftly than she had come.

Inwardly, Goldie recoiled. Inwardly, Kleath cursed, but they picked up the threads of their interrupted conversation as though no disturbance had occurred.

CHAPTER III

To the fact that no national recognition was taken of the launching of the *Yukon World*, Tim Meadows never became entirely reconciled. It would not have surprised him had Her Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria, made the occasion one for universal rejoicing throughout the Empire! Indeed, he had confidently expected her to acknowledge the event in some fairly conspicuous way — by resorting, perhaps, to the simple but satisfactory expedient of “pressing a button.” Arsenals and hospitals and town halls had been opened by the pressing of a button, why should the first issue of the *Yukon World* not have been released in this same manner?

Why, Meadows bitterly asked himself, had Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the “silver-tongued,” not referred in Parliament to the passing of this milestone in Canadian history? Why had the press of the Dominion not given to the event the prominence it deserved?

Meadows was astonished, mortified, indignant to

realize that by the people "Outside," the epoch was marked by no ceremony at all.

He had no complaint to register, however, against the reception of the paper in the vicinity of Dawson. Business was suspended, miners crowded in from the creeks and the throng of people on the street made the town look like "Circus Day," back home. Upwards of sixty thousand copies of the sheet were sold, each resident who could produce a quarter or more purchasing not only one paper for himself, but several copies to send to the folks on the "Outside."

Len Cavendish, who combined the advertising managership with his constabulary duties, oversold his advertising space, so that the *World* was forced to increase its size by two pages on the first day. Tim Meadows and his thirty-four competitors vied with one another in the attractiveness of their advertisements. The "Parisian Dance Hall" lent itself to pictorial embellishment rather too well for much close competition, although the "Blue Elephant" was "in the money." Everybody tried to figure in the paper, and those who had no claims to sell, no wares to cry, no eating-houses to extol and no professions worth mentioning, invited correspondence with women of adventurous taste and affectionate disposition.

"Gosh," breathed Meadows, his expanse of smile giving him the appearance of a playful crocodile, "this is great!" He had fingered one paper almost into shreds and knew three of the editorials by heart. "This is certainly great! An' to think av it, darter, to-morrer there'll be another wan. Didn't Oi tell ye our linotype setter was some wur-ruker?"

He stood by no means alone in attributing much of the success of that first issue to Kleath, and would, at the moment, have cheerfully given him anything he possessed even unto the half of his kingdom.

With a pad over one eye — and Barney McCool — Kleath had been permitted, after a fortnight's convalescence, to go to the plant. There, he found that Tim's statement regarding the capabilities of the employees had not been grossly exaggerated. Although a few of the boys knew something of their particular jobs, there seemed no one person competent to superintend the installing of the presses; certainly not the foreman who had represented himself to Weatherby as knowing just a little less than the Almighty. He might have known more, but for the fact that he had been for three years out of touch with the work. However, by going to the plant earlier, and remaining later than any one else, by applying himself to any and every job which came

to hand, and by instructing the boys with a simplicity and conciseness impossible to misunderstand, Kleath, a veritable engine of energy, soon had the first issue on the press.

It was not unusual to find the boys clustered round the linotype machine while, neglecting their own work, they watched its operator "eat up" the copy which could not be supplied him fast enough. Even Duke found occasion to keep to that part of the room.

"Silverlocks" Inglis, an old-fashioned handsetter, who had been associated with Weatherby in the East, and who had come "In" with his, reported to his chief with an enthusiasm which was almost hyperbolic.

"Honest, Chief," said the old man, "he's a natural-born wonder! I don't want to do any croakin' so early in the game, but we won't keep him in Dawson, long. Why, he hasn't any sense to hang around here on a salary, supposin' it is fifteen bucks a day! He could make a fortune just by givin' exhibitions."

"I thought his references sounded convincing," smiled Weatherby.

"What that lad needs is a couple of volumes of the encyclopædia every day," continued Inglis.

"You can't keep him busy with a dinkey little newspaper like this. When he isn't workin' at the machine, he's hustlin' round helpin' some of the galoots who call themselves printers. Beats me to know what a feller like him was doin' in 'Frisco, without a job. Why, any of the big sheets would have eat out of his hand to get him."

"Apparently, they did," said the chief. "He told me, and the statement was confirmed by his testimonials, that the wanderlust drove him from place to place. He couldn't settle for any length of time, but I hope this town will break the spell and that every one will make it attractive for him in Dawson. We need him badly. What about the boys in the plant?"

Inglis knew what he meant, and the old man hesitated. It was, he felt, none of his business, if Kleath did not resent the thousand little slights and indignities levelled at him by the foreman, things which, happening once or twice, might have passed as accidents, but which, by their frequency and accuracy of aim, left no doubt as to their object. A genuine liking for the man tempted Inglis to seek for him the protection of the chief, a comparatively simple matter once Weatherby was informed of the state of affairs in the plant. Inglis well realized

that, should matters be brought to a crisis, Duke would lose his position, for his removal would not seriously affect the routine. But Kleath was an absolute necessity. Was he justified, therefore, under the circumstances, in bearing tales, and indulging in a practice hitherto avoided — meddling in other people's business?

Before he had satisfactorily argued the issue, however, Weatherby's voice broke in upon his thoughts, sharply, as he repeated his question.

"I say," demanded the editor, "what about the boys in the plant?"

"When they met, there wasn't any hair-pulling," compromised Inglis as he left the office.

That something of a sensational nature was anticipated when Kleath and his assailant met, seemed evident judging by the number of persons who found it imperative to be in their vicinity at that particular time.

Nothing spectacular occurred, however. Kleath was standing with a group of men outside the plant, when Duke approached with his customary swagger.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said, in an unpleasantly jovial manner. "And you, too, *Mr. Kleath!*"

The implication Kleath overlooked, but the de-

risive emphasis upon his name rankled afresh, although none could guess it as he returned a curt, "Good morning."

That was all. Duke drove his men into the plant and Kleath went with them. The thrills of the over-curious subsided and ran cold.

At work there were a few hours when Duke was too busy to single out any one person for his objectionable attentions. There was little doubt, however, where they would center once the rush was over, but, as Inglis noticed, his jibes were of so subtle a nature as scarcely to warrant an open resentment on Kleath's part. For example, although all the other men were addressed by their Christian or nicknames, the linotype setter was to Duke "*Mr. Kleath*," and the deference he made occasions to display held in it always a tinge of subtle mockery.

To the casual observer it might have appeared that Duke was trying to make awkward amends for his previous violence, but Kleath and Inglis knew better.

The novelty of the paper was wearing off and the haunting fear of the townsfolk, in general, and Tim Meadows, in particular, that "a daily was too good to be true," was fading away before Kleath had

time to realize how embarrassing was his position with regard to the Merediths. Too tired when the day's work was over to do more than stumble to the hotel supper and sodden sleep, he had seen Goldie but once since the first issue of the paper. Clare Meredith he had not seen at all. Her visits had ceased with automatic abruptness dating from the morning she discovered Goldie in his room. But the doctor he had seen frequently, and on each of these occasions he refused, upon pretexts increasingly flimsy, the latter's invitation to break bread with him.

"Extreme sensitiveness was never one of my failings," Meredith remarked one evening, as he overtook Kleath going home from the plant, "but I am free to confess that a bruise is beginning to show somewhere in my cosmos at your persistent attitude of unfriendliness. What's the answer, Patient? Does the excessive informality of us Dawson-folk offend you? Are you confusing Yukon hospitality with that of Continental Court Circles? Are you waiting for a gold-embossed, hand-tooled, page-delivered invitation from the Princess sent ten days in advance?"

"That would certainly bring me," Kleath murmured, with a laugh.

Frank Meredith possessed that rare charm of manner which appeals alike to the old and the young, to men and to women, to coarse and refined, and it was hard for Kleath to withstand him. At the same time, he could hardly accept an invitation which had not been sanctioned by his wife, neither could he give Clare's misconception of him as an excuse for his refusal. But the following morning he received a letter from her — a characteristic letter in which all the blame was transferred to the innocent person.

"My dear Mr. Kleath,

"Not being a good disciplinarian, I have decided to forgive you long before an adequate term of punishment has been inflicted. Frank is terribly keen on having you dine with us and I am free to confess a curiosity as to the color of your eyes. So will you drop in and take pot luck with us this evening at half past seven?

"Yours graciously,

"CLARE MEREDITH."

Kleath was more than a little surprised. He had not taken the doctor's bantering satire quite in earnest, neither had he imagined that his retort would be treated seriously. He wondered, throughout the day, whether Clare's invitation had been spontaneous or the result of a suggestion on her husband's part, and he prepared to accept it with that feeling of

embarrassment from which he was never quite free with certain types of women.

It was broad daylight when Oyada admitted him to the Merediths' home, but, with the closing of the door, the Venetian splendor of a flaming afterglow was blotted out, and he stood presently in a room monotonously brilliant with unnecessary lighting.

The room contained an amazing assortment of picturesque crudities offset by equally amazing evidences of effete civilization — *bibelots*, which would have interested a visitor to Fifth Avenue or Berkeley Square, but which looked as humorously incongruous in the mining camp as a *Vernis-Martin* cabinet would look in a kitchen. To a keen observer it told much of the temperament of the woman who was responsible for its furnishings, a woman who, goaded by a frenzy of loathing for its blatant and homely simplicity, had plunged into the purchase of extravagant absurdities as a relief to her eye and ease to her fretted soul.

Over the rough pine floors unable to deny their lowly origin in spite of paint and varnish, glowed two excellent examples of Persian industry. On the walls were several bits of tapestry appearing very much as a velvet portière might have looked against an iceberg. Offsetting a rough, home-made table,

was an exquisite ivory miniature of the Taj Mahal; and standing humorously on guard at one side of the rough, stone fireplace, was a set of flimsy brass tongs about as useful in handling the huge logs which were fed into its gaping, black maw, as a hat pin would be in lifting a steel girder. Kleath was conscious of a bewildering medley of odors — food in the process of cooking, a faint suggestion of disinfectant mingled with tobacco, a strong exotic scent which reminded him of tropical flowers, and over all, the insidious, pungent odor of the perspiring Oriental.

But the most startling, amazing and wholly incongruous touch about the whole house was the mistress of it herself, who burst upon Kleath like some astounding revelation.

"A cold, unfriendly gray," she cried, coming swiftly toward him and looking at him from a height almost equal to his own. "It's astonishing how many men in the Yukon have cold, gray eyes."

Unprepared for the suddenness of her coming and for the boldness of her beauty and her costume, Kleath's face reflected the bewilderment of his mind. Clare laughed, well pleased with the impression she created — exactly the impression she had intended to create.

Tall, slender, sinuous as a serpent, her jet-black

hair crowned by a heavy gold fillet, her low-cut amber gown throwing into relief the dead whiteness of her skin, a plethora of noisy bangles, artificial gems, twinkling at him with her slightest movement, Kleath's hostess was dressed more suitably, in his opinion, for a costume ball than an informal dinner in the Yukon.

"What did you think I would be like?" she asked, naïvely taking it for granted that curiosity had made havoc with his night's rest.

"I was prepared to see the most beautiful woman in Dawson," returned Kleath.

"Oh, come now! No unvarnished flattery of that sort! You need not think that a few pretty speeches will obliterate the bad marks which are heavy and black against your name." She lit a cigarette and flung herself into a chair. "Tell me why —"

Voices sounded outside and the front door closed.

"Pshaw!" said Clare. "Here comes Frank bringing Medford Delany. I did not expect them so soon. Well, we will have to discuss that, later. I hope you can eat anything. Frank says Oyada's cooking is like an umbrella — it has ups and downs, and I am perfectly helpless in the kitchen. My theory is that if one knows how to do a thing well,

one is so often called upon to do it — so I won't learn to do any of the things I dislike. Besides, I can't endure a woman who always suggests dish water and potato peelings."

The doctor and Delany came into the room.

"Have we kept you waiting, Princess?" asked the former, as he kissed his wife's hand.

"Oh, no more than usual," she answered, carelessly. "What can a doctor's poor wife expect?" She turned to Delany with a brilliant smile.

He also bent over her hand, kissing it so as to bring a vivid blush to Clare's cheek. She laughed and called him a "silly old goat."

"Even a goat is blessed with an appreciation for the divinely beautiful," he said, keeping his eyes off her bare neck, with difficulty.

"Of course you know Mr. Kleath?" she asked, rather cutting short her husband's cordial greeting.

"Who does not?" Delany assumed the manner he frequently adopted toward strangers — strange men — whose good will and admiration he wished to acquire without any effort on his part beyond the smearing of a little flattery. Although assistant editor of the *Yukon World*, he was one of the few who had not acknowledged Kleath's convalescence by a call of kindness or curiosity and to some men this

flagrant omission of the hospitable might have suggested thin ice which called for careful crossing. Delany, however, stepped boldly. He extended a carelessly friendly hand — fleshy and soft, with great pads at the base of each slim finger.

“Glad to meet you, now,” he continued. “Knew I would run across you when we got strapped to the infernal treadmill — probably see more than enough of one another down there, anyway — hate visitors, myself, when I am sick — and, after all, you are in pocket, eh, what? I’ll have my drink on you, later.”

He turned to the small table nearby and picked up a photograph of his hostess, in the contemplation of which he relegated Kleath and his affairs to what, in his opinion, was their proper place.

The dinner was obviously designed to be more of a function than a meal — a tiny Court over which Clare reigned as queen. Her craving for adulation, adoration and conquest was rather pathetic, considering that one man at the table gave the best and finest of which his generous nature was capable (and she did not recognize it!), and one had nothing more to give than the homage ordinary courtesy demanded (and she wanted so much more!), and Delany’s bold admiration was so ready of utterance

that it lacked the depth of sincerity and was valueless save as a sop to her vanity.

"Isn't she wonderful?" He addressed no one in particular. "'Pon my soul I am dazzled, bewildered when I look at her! Hers is the sort of beauty to which a man never becomes accustomed, the sort which strikes *me* dumb every time I see her!"

Because these and similar ravings expressed his own most sacred convictions, Meredith glowed with pride and thought Delany rather a fine fellow. He envied the man his gift of speech, without pausing to consider that such proficiency in the gentle art of flattery had been acquired by diligent and constant practice. He coveted one of the brilliant flashes from his wife's dark eyes, which always answered these passionate tributes to her charms; he was fully aware of the fact that a woman's appetite for praise is insatiable, but his expression of it, toward Clare, was too deep to take the form of superficial compliment; he could not tell his wife how wonderful she was to him and that her loveliness was the sort to which he never became accustomed. He was literally dumb in her presence, but he looked at her with something fettered, something imprisoned, in his eyes. He could only try to live his tribute to her.

Dinner was half over when a wave of insistent clamor beat against the door. The illusion of a queen and her court vanished. There arose, instead, the reality of a busy doctor leaving his meal at the call of an irreverent proletariat.

"Some borree verly damn sick," muttered Oyada, as he hurried from the room.

"Of course," complained Clare. "Somebody always is."

In a few moments he was back.

"Rittle babee sick," he announced, to the accompaniment of loud sobbing in the hallway.

Meredith pushed back his chair and rose. "Who is it?"

"Pink-ree Wade rittle babee," answered the Jap, indifferently, as he resumed his duties.

"So sorry, Princess, but I must go." The doctor went to Kleath and held out his hand. "Babies are too scarce in the Yukon to justify me in taking chances with them. Consider that Dawson has a population of some 20,000 souls of whom only about one hundred are children, and you will not wonder at my anxiety for their welfare. . . . Good-by, Delany," he shook hands, "you must come soon again, both of you."

Clare spoke petulantly,

"I wish you would put an end to this eating half a meal at a time, Frank. Really, it is getting on my nerves. You might consider me, sometimes, even though I am not one of your hundred precious children. Let the people wait. Other physicians do."

"You wouldn't have me keep them waiting, if the case were urgent, Princess; you know you wouldn't. But we must see that your nerves do not suffer. Why not bring yourself to believe that I really thrive on half meals? Why, I wouldn't know what to do with whole rations! There's a good prescription for your worry."

He started for his bag.

"Worry!" echoed Clare. "That is not the word. It's the nuisance of eternally putting something aside for you, and the confusion of our every meal. Upon my soul, I don't know why Oyada does not rebel. I should have cleared out long ago had I been independent enough to live on a salary. But, of course, being a wife, I have no salary. Don't you believe in salaried wives, Mr. Kleath? Great heavens, how that child yells! One would think that shanty housed but one baby to get hurt or ill every day in the week! Pinkie . . . oh, Pinkie," she called. "Stop that fuss and come here."

After a good deal of shuffling and a good deal of

snuffling, an enormously fat boy appeared in the doorway. His tears had made pink furrows against the grime of his puffy cheeks, and his little red pig's eyes were almost closed from weeping. In them was combined the vacancy and the cunning of the idiot.

"If you don't stop that horrible noise," said Clare, "I won't allow the doctor to go with you at all. A great big boy like you crying like an infant . . . shame! What is the matter with the baby? It can't be so very sick."

The boy opened his mouth and howled afresh, his head tipped backward, his whole attitude suggesting that of a dog yelping at the moon.

"Tur-ble — tur-ble," he wailed. "All on fire — burn all over — no more clothes — not even any skin. I just had one little match —" He broke off and chuckled, "Lots of smoke — lots of noise."

Clare shuddered.

"You fiend!" she cried. "You inhuman fiend! Take him away, somebody; he makes me feel quite faint."

Delany rose quickly and, with a series of well-directed kicks, persuaded Pinkie that his presence was no longer welcome. The boy giggled, while waiting for the doctor, and muttered to himself.

Meredith hurried into the room and stooped over his wife's chair. His kiss was not the perfunctory caress of the man who has more important issues on hand; it was the supreme issue of the moment.

"We shall be desolated without you, dear Francis," said Delany, airily. "Great display of gastronomic control, your being able to leave this jolly little dinner. If you ever have any time, look me up in my 'digs.' Quite comfy now, you know. The old cabin was a regular sty."

"Oh, he will have plenty of time for you," Clare broke in. "He has time for every one except his wife. She is the only person in all the Yukon who has no claim upon him."

Meredith did not answer this, but he contradicted it with a smile. At the door he turned and looked back into the room as though he wished to fill his very being with Clare's image. Then, with a cheery word to Pinkie, he left the house, whistling.

It seemed to Kleath as though something had gone from the atmosphere, something which left it vapid and heavy. And he was not an imaginative man.

"How is your fascinating little housekeeper, Medford?" asked Clare, abruptly. "Have you the same one, or has fickleness prompted you to try another?"

"Ah, Princess," he answered, without the least embarrassment, "constancy is my only virtue. Have I not proven it?" He looked expressively at her and she laughed.

"But that is not answering my question."

"Well, then — yes, if you are interested. Tess still keeps my Lares and Penates dusted, so to speak. I am flattered that you seem to feel it matters."

"How old is she now? A perfect infant yet, I understand. Ed Farnum swears that she plays with dolls. Has she any education, and is she of any — er — use, I mean practical use? Or is she just a cute little toy?"

Clare hurled these questions at her guest with a total disregard of what the average person would call "propriety." And she insisted upon answers. In the Yukon a spade was boldly called a spade, but it need not have been dragged into the room at all, thought Kleath as he listened. It might well have been left in the garden for rougher hands to use.

It was futile to profess ignorance of the private life of Medford Delany. Private life was public in Dawson, and Tess's status was no secret; it was recognized, such domestic arrangement being no unusual thing in a bachelor ménage. Gossip whispered, moreover, behind a rather smudgy hand, that

Tess not only kept house for this lawyer from the Middle West, but that she provided for the up-keep of the home, as well as funds with which Delany might gamble away the night with any one who could be found to play with him. Kleath knew that his hostess must be informed concerning some of these tales at least, and he was shocked to hear her use the subject as a topic of conversation.

Perhaps she was conscious of his attitude, and persisted from a spirit of pure recklessness — Clare always enjoyed making a sensation — perhaps her finer sensibilities had been dulled. In either event, she gave Delany no peace and Kleath no freedom from embarrassment, until the former, never a willing party to a triangular conversation — especially where men prevailed — pleaded a pressing engagement and begged to be dismissed.

“An affair of honor, Princess,” he explained. “Nothing less could drag me away. Have I your gracious permission to depart?”

And Clare, secretly glad to be rid of him, pretended great indignation, contending that no decent, respectable woman could hope to rival the artists of the dance halls in general and Tiny Tess in particular. “We glumly virtuous folk are offered no reward for righteousness,” said she.

Delany murmured something about a game of cards.

"Gambling!" she exclaimed. "Bosh! I should hope to hold my own against a paper queen. But there, run away. I will have forgiven you, no doubt, by the time you want to come back."

Kleath rose.

"But *you* can't go!" Her distress was genuine. "Somebody has to stay with me. I didn't expect this desertion on the part of both of you, and allowed Oyada to go out. I simply can't stay in the house by myself."

Delany looked at her with appreciation. He never knew in matters of this sort how far Fate had ordained them, and how far Clare had stage-managed the acts. Had she expected him to leave earlier than Kleath? he wondered, with a wrench to his pride. That she had stayed in the house alone many a time, he knew for a fact. He was half-persuaded not to go. He would have enjoyed spending the evening quite alone with her, but he found no pleasure in sharing her with Kleath or any other man. So he took his cue and made his exit at the proper moment, hoping that he left the impression of a man whose presence is indispensable at many functions.

Clare closed the door upon him, softly, and went back to Kleath. She was flushed with an overwhelming satisfaction.

"That was lucky, wasn't it?" she asked, lighting a cigarette. Then, seeing the surprise on his face, she added, "I mean now we can go on with our interrupted discussion. I always hate leaving a thing before it is settled one way or the other. Of course, it was a foregone conclusion that Frank would be called out, but I didn't expect that Medford would be so — so easily disposed of. He usually sticks like a bur. Tremendously glad to have him, ordinarily," she felt forced to say, "but not just now."

Kleath muttered something intended to sound like an expression of pleasure, and wondered when the doctor would come back. If Meredith's going had taken some quality from the atmosphere, which impoverished it, Delany's going actually drained it of what, to Kleath, seemed like a tangible barrier between Clare and himself. Had he been given to fantastic imaginings he would have felt that she stood before him in a state of mental nakedness. She seemed to have slipped off a garment previously worn, and he was embarrassed beyond the telling.

He became acutely conscious that the night was

far spent and that he was alone with her. Moreover, he felt that she wished him to be conscious of these things, and that his unwilling presence, his grudging protection and his apparent discomfort only provoked her laughter and her mockery. There was, he thought, almost a contempt for him in her eyes, as they gleamed and sparkled behind the drifts of smoke which rose from her cigarette.

She blew several perfect rings from a pair of very red lips, and then broke the silence,

"Your discomfort is nothing compared to what mine was on that wretched morning in your room. I could have died with shame and humiliation . . . competing with that creature."

Kleath's mind flew back across the intervening days to the last visit Clare had paid him, and he flushed hotly as he remembered her manner and her blatant insult to Goldie Meadows. Looking at her now, he could imagine how she must have appeared then, standing on his threshold, anger in her eyes and false accusation in her heart. He contrasted this picture with one of Goldie, her soothing hands pressed against his throbbing, bandaged head, gentleness and innocent friendliness written unmistakably over her. He fancied her look of interested surprise, followed by a start and a sort of quiver

which communicated itself to him as Clare had delivered her invective, and then there was a relapse into gentleness again. Would it occur to Goldie, he demanded of himself, to judge Clare Meredith as she had been judged?

"You took an exaggerated view of a perfectly natural situation," he heard himself say, stiffly.

Kleath was peculiar in that he felt there were some topics unfit for general discussion. He would have found conversation on this particular subject quite impossible had not Clare's unabashed questioning of Delany somewhat prepared him for it. He looked at her, hesitating in his search for words, and then added,

"The whole circumstance was most regrettable. But I repeat that you made a mistake in erroneously judging a harmless situation," and there he hoped the topic would close.

But he did not know Clare. She laughed unpleasantly.

"Is that all you have to say? Perhaps you feel — and with a certain amount of justice, I admit — that your private affairs are none of my business, that my attitude should have expressed pained but forgiving womanhood, or a careless acceptance of what you are pleased to call 'a perfectly natural sit-

uation.' Certainly it holds nothing of the unusual, here. You are travelling the way of the majority. But just there, Christopher Kleath, is where the hurt, the shock, came. I had thought of you as being different from — a cut above — the majority, and to discover that my estimate had been a purely idealized one — well, the tableau I interrupted rather caught me by the throat, as it were. I feel that you expect an apology. I can make but an explanation."

He tried to interrupt, but she held up a silencing hand.

"I have been here three years," she went on with a sort of passionate resentment, "and they have been a living death. Not the least of my trial is the remembrance that I urged Frank to come, thinking he could make a pot of money quickly and easily, after which we could go home and luxuriate. I like to luxuriate. Well, he hasn't made money; he never will. He doesn't believe that he should practise medicine to make money — he thinks his mission is service to mankind, or some nonsense like that. But the worst thing is he doesn't want to go home, now . . . he loves the Yukon. Fancy any one wanting to live all their youth in Dawson; fancy any one knowing they had to live until they died in Dawson!

I don't believe he considers my hideous homesickness or loneliness. In all these years, I have never had a friend. I am not ashamed of confessing that I don't get on well with everybody. The women here, I loathe. Those who might be interesting are impossible — you know what I mean, and the others are deadly. The men accept the standards of the Yukon and appear to have no need for a woman who cannot be bought and sold. What would they do with mere friendship? I associate with them — who else? — but I do not give them *my* friendship. I was ready to give it to you."

"But you are all wrong," Kleath interrupted. "I am no better than other men, and no more worthy of a good woman's friendship, so I make no plea for myself. But I should be worse than a cad if I allowed you to do little Goldie Meadows this rank injustice. Why, good God, Mrs. Meredith," he burst out, flushing at the very suggestion of Goldie in the position Clare had assigned her, "that girl is as sweet and innocent as — as — you are!"

Clare sighed indulgently.

"You men all say that."

"I would not — unless it were true."

He forgot the lateness of the hour and that he was alone with her. He forgot everything in his

determination to vindicate Goldie and readjust Clare Meredith's opinion of her. He told the meagre little story of her life, he pictured with considerable eloquence her purity of mind, likening it to a clean-skinned person amid a colony of lepers, a person impervious to contamination, and he spoke forcefully of Tim Meadows's protection of his daughter and his rough but effective shielding of her.

"Why, he would kill any man who took what he considered a liberty with her," declared Kleath. "Don't take my word for it — ask your husband; he knows the standing of all these people."

She had risen from her chair and looked down at him, cynically. He thought he had never seen so ugly a beautiful woman.

"Don't waste any more breath," she said, wearily. "You have put up an excellent argument and I am quite convinced that the lady is a paragon of virtue. I don't mind saying I am sorry I was rude."

She offered him her hand and clung to his in a way which appealed to his chivalry and won his ready sympathy. He could always find excuses for a woman; so, laying aside his resentment, he talked to her of music, of books, of pictures and the galleries "back home."

But later, as he walked to the hotel, he rehearsed

the unpleasant conversation and was quite at a loss to understand — he knew so little of that complicated structure called woman — how he got the impression that Clare was annoyed because she had been convinced of Goldie's innocence.

CHAPTER IV

In a very short time, Christopher Kleath became the obsession of Dawson.

Mystery is defined as that which baffles the understanding, but when the mysterious is combined with an attractive masculine personality, it becomes an obsession which is proof indisputable of the opening statement.

In the first place, Kleath was naturally reserved. He showed a decided disinclination to talk about himself, to feature himself as the hero of trying situations and the vanquisher of varied types of foes. From this paucity of reminiscence, there resulted a meagreness of information regarding him, and his associates found themselves at a loss to "set" him in any definite locality or stratum.

Yet there was nothing secretive in his reserve, he never gave the impression of concealing anything. When put through the social "Third Degree," he answered direct questions with a direct but discouraging monosyllable, and he kept turning the conversation away from himself — so far away, that it was

like trying to divert a stream of water through a sun-baked desert ever to turn it back again. Even in his most loquacious moments the information he gave was either general or it pertained to some one else — the mayor of Columbus, the police inspector of Chicago, the first female physician in Brooklyn, or the like. And he did this so cleverly that people did not realize, at first, how little they knew of the man who was agitating their midst in so unconcerned a manner.

A composite opinion of him gathered from various groups and sources, would have read something like this:

A good looking, pleasant fellow of about thirty years. (This was unanimous.)

Home town — Boston, New York, Brooklyn, Chicago, Philadelphia, Havana, a farm near Pittsburgh, a plantation in Louisiana.

Occupation — a mechanic, a newspaper owner who had suddenly come a cropper, a professional billiard player, a professor in some university.

Married, single, divorced, a widower.

The "boy" — a Jap whose years must have numbered fifty — taking care of his room at the hotel, thought he was a gentleman of great wealth, slightly unbalanced on the subject of the nobility of

work. The "Upper Crust" of Dawson were somewhat similarly minded, appreciating his knowledge of the polite amenities.

The men in the plant, imbued with social ambitions, recognized in him the born mechanic, and reasoned that he was merely an ordinary laborer, who, by his attractive personality, had been accepted in circles higher than those to which he was entitled by birth. Anyone could acquire polish under these circumstances.

Duke, to whom every one looked for accurate information, muffled his speech to vague hints—"the Long Arm of the Law"—"reach some day right into Dawson and pluck him away"—"murder will out." At the same time, his opinion lost considerable weight when he confessed to no previous acquaintance with his linotypist and declared that he had never even seen him before. "I just didn't like him," he explained when questioned as to the cause of his violently expressed aversion. "Curly hair and creased pants! Besides, he puts on too much dog—the damned fashion-plate tenderfoot!"

The girls of the "San Domingo" were persuaded that sentiment played a large part in his past. He was possibly a fugitive from the unwelcome indiscretions of some married woman; or maybe his

sweetheart had been bludgeoned by a flint-hearted father into marrying some one else — no one could deliberately jilt Kleath. It was even possible that his sweetheart had been snatched from him by the relentless hand of Death, and he had come to the Yukon seeking forgetfulness. He might be somebody in disguise . . . and they could not decide whether they preferred for him a dukedom, an English estate and departure from Alaskan territory, or a plain American fortune and an indefinite residence in Dawson.

Goldie, whom they tried to probe, knew scarcely more than the rest, and what little bits of information she had gleaned, she guarded jealously, choosing to look upon them as confidences. A nice instinct warned her against poking about Kleath's past; even Clare Meredith learned to smother her curiosity and to profess an impersonal interest she was far from feeling. Once in a while she questioned Weatherby, with whom Kleath sat night after night in the lounge of the hotel and to whom he grew closer through the medium of that abiding silencer of tongues and communicator of thoughts — the Pipe.

"My dear Mrs. Meredith," he would say, "I am not a clairvoyant! I only know what you all

know — he lives at a good hotel, he smokes good cigars and tobacco, he is always ready to lend a fellow a five-dollar bill and is not overly particular about collecting it. Yet he can't be wealthy, for he works harder than any two men at the plant. What more shall I tell you — that he doesn't drink and doesn't gamble and that I think him a tip-top fellow? "

He might have said that often, as the two sat and smoked, there was a look in Kleath's eyes which seemed to hint at a heavy black cloud hanging over him, a cloud denser and blacker than the darkness which was rapidly descending over the Yukon. For the short summer was sliding into winter and men who had dawdled about the dance halls through perpetual daylight, gathered up pick and shovel and many, many candles; and they went back to the frozen creeks where, burrowing like moles, they alternately thawed and dug the frost-bound earth which yielded them its gold, capriciously.

In all that community there was scarcely a person who did not attribute Kleath's coming amongst them to some reason better hidden than revealed, and no greater tribute can be paid him than to state that the very persons who had built up (for him) a somber personal history were more than indifferently

curious; they were sympathetically interested and declared that "whatever he had under his lid, they would take a long chance in helping him get away with it."

Even Barney McCool, whose idolatry was open and unabashed, looked upon Kleath as a "brother in error" and loved him the more for his mysterious weakness.

It was Barney, of course, who professed an intimate knowledge of all the points which baffled the community at large. Barney professed an intimate knowledge of everything. There was not a spot upon the face of the globe at which he had not touched, not a person of prominence one could mention to whom he was a stranger; the gifts from royalty and potentates thrust upon him would have filled a large museum!

But there was no one with whom a man's most sacred confidences would have been safer, for, although they were sure to be poured into the ear of the first person who would stop to listen, they were as certain to be discarded as figments of the Irishman's lavish imagination. "Turn off the mouth meter, McCool," said Dawson. "We know that the truth is not in you."

As a general thing men fled from him and his

inexhaustible fund of anecdotes and experiences, but, when he touched upon the subject of Kleath, they gathered round him and encouraged him to talk.

"Is it true," one would ask, with a good deal of rib-poking and shin-kicking, "that his father disinherited him for refusing to marry an English duchess?"

"I say, Barney," another would inquire, "you, knowing him so well, ought to be able to tell us whether there is anything in the story about his being one of the Rothschilds, incog?"

"I heard," a third flippant spirit would suggest, "that he was dismissed from the Church — couldn't quell the constant riots among the women who wanted to marry him. That's why he's so shy in the 'Hall.' First thing we know, he'll be starting in to do a little missionary work with us. How's that, Barney?"

And McCool, with many a nod and wink, would answer, "Shure, byes, an' ye know Oi'm not the man to bethray the confidences av a fri'nd, so Oi'm not sayin' ye're roight. But moind ye, byes, ye can think over the fact that Oi'm not sayin'—ye're wrong."

No suggestion was too extravagant to contain for Barney McCool an element of possibility. Kleath

might well have refused to marry a duchess, or he might be a near relative of some enormously wealthy family, or he might have sought the Yukon as a refuge from the persecution of mothers with marriageable daughters, or from women who had no daughters at all!

The only thing Barney declared beyond the range of possibility was Kleath's association with crime, and this he denied with an earnestness which bordered upon the tragic. Although secretly convinced that his hero's residence in Dawson was the result of some impetuous, regretted indiscretion, nothing on earth could have wrung this admission from him; and he, usually so keen to scent a whiff of humor, was as dull as a jellyfish when it came to seeing any fun in these gossipy conjectures.

The boys found vast amusement in connecting Kleath with every offense known to the "Underworld," from "second story work" to bigamy, and watching their effect upon Barney, but it remained for "Big Bill" Buck to strike the blow which turned the world black for him — for a time, at least.

"I say, Mac," the huge, hairy miner had the manner of giving a confidentially friendly warning, "did you notice the way that stranger kept his lamps trained on Chris this afternoon? Wouldn't

surprise me a little bit, if he wasn't a 'plain clothes man,' just stuffed with extradition papers. Of course you know that Chris is wanted in Reno, don't you?"

The boys wagged their heads with great solemnity and tried their best to keep from laughing, but Barney was oblivious to it; he was stunned.

Until that moment he had always thought of Kleath as having safely eluded the Frankenstein of his past, and to realize that this grim specter might ferret him out, might descend upon him and annihilate him, threw the whole world into darkness and disorder.

He left the noisy group at the "San Domingo" and sought the quiet of his own cabin. He must think this matter out . . . there must be found a place of refuge. . . .

He became as inseparable from Kleath as a bad conscience. He viewed every stranger with suspicion and distrust, until identification proved an absence of papers or handcuffs from his person. But even these precautions were insufficient protection against emergency. Stark terror prompted him to speak to Kleath.

"Ye know, Chris," he said, abruptly, having failed to get a diplomatic lead, "ye know Oi've often

told ye about that claim Oi've got up on a certain creek — niver moind the name just now? Well, did Oi iver tell ye that there's a little cabin on it? No? Shure, an' Oi'll be forgettin' me own noime next! Av course there's a little cabin — a rare an' lonesome place — that nobody knows about except meself — not even " — he lowered his voice, mysteriously, although there was none to hear, " the government agent! An' it's no lie, Oi'm tellin' ye, Chris. Oi don't belave a bloodhound could trail his master there, unless he had a map tied onto the end av his nose! But it's 'asy enough whin ye know the route — over the Dome an' off to the left av the Big Claims, then up a gully to two grand rocks sthandin' guard on either side; an' behind thim are five fir trees shaped loike the letter V. To the right av the east point lies the shack. If iver ye felt as though ye would loike to get away fer a bit — nice an' quiet loike —" he stumbled awkwardly through his unique invitation, embarrassed that Kleath should evince no greater interest — "just follow the directions on this bit av paper, an' Oi'll promise ye that the fur-rust disturbance ye'll hear, unless ye want wan — will be Gabriel startin' up his horn."

He thrust a soiled piece of paper into Kleath's

hand and bolted. Kleath, to whom the invitation and the scrawling lines were utterly meaningless, looked after his guest, bewildered. Then he put the paper carefully away in his pocket — and forgot all about it.

It was as cold a winter as Dawson had ever known, and combined with a temperature which dropped to the seventies and hung there, was a heavy fog, which lifted occasionally only to reveal a leaden sky and dusk which was dimmer than twilight.

Many and many a day at twelve o'clock high noon, it was impossible to see the proverbial hand before the proverbial face. Walking abroad produced the eerie sensation of immense solitude, until two persons collided and peered at one another, bent upon recognition.

The cold was such, to quote "Diamond Tooth" Lizzie, dragging about her several thousand dollars' worth of furs, "as to bring gooseflesh to a polar bear." Meat had to be chopped or sawed with ordinary wood-cutting implements; meals froze on the table; whiskey in its kegs. There was a memorable occasion when the "San Domingo" "went dry" and no one knew why this had happened until Tim Meadows and "Big Bill" Buck, as unaffected and consistent drinkers as the Yukon harbored,

slipped to the floor blind drunk after three fingers of slowly-dripping whiskey.

"Send for the M. P.!" cried a bystander.

"Get some mustard and water!" advised another.

"Dirty work!" commented a third. "A knock-out drop, for sure!"

And a group, who said nothing, gaped stupidly at the unusual sight.

Then Barney McCool took command of the situation.

"Sthand back, iverbody," he cried. "Would ye smother the min wid yer damfool curiosity? Sind for nayther the polace nor the mustard. Put 'em to bed, that's all they want. . . . Fer the rest, shure an' if ye'll bust open the kegs, Oi'll bet me shur-r-rt, ye'll foind the root av the throuble . . . the craythur's frozen behind an' before, l'avin' only a little puddle in the middle, so sthrong, begorra, that it would put old Bacchus, himself, to slape. Don't Oi remimber the same thing happened in Patagonia — only wur-rse?"

But the crowd, more curious as to the cause of the phenomenon than the story of Barney's adventure, called to Ben Tisdale and demanded the opening of the keg. Sure enough, they found it lined with whiskey crystals and in the very center there

gaped a small cavity in which the pure stuff, the concentrated alcohol, had gathered and from which it had slowly dripped to the sudden undoing of Meadows and Bill Buck. They slept for twenty-eight hours.

On a night when people darted like hoar-covered ghosts in and out of the fog, when the lucky ones who could stay indoors huddled over red hot stoves and shivered; on a night when, to avoid the worst draughts, women placed their rocking chairs on the beds and there wrapped round with all the available quilts, tried to keep sufficiently supple fingers to do the week's mending, Barney McCool decided to entertain a small and select gathering of poker players in his hillside cabin.

Kleath was there because his definite refusal would have thrown Barney into a state of depression from which a derrick could hardly have lifted him; Delany was there because he was never very far from anything which looked like gambling. Bill Buck, Len Cavendish and Eddie Farnum, the teller of the bank, were there, because they enjoyed a riotous time wherever it was to be found.

They looked more like Brownies than human beings. Their bodies, encased in a variety of sweaters and sundry other garments, were abnor-

mally large; their arms and legs abnormally fat and short, and their heads, protruding from rolls of multi-colored collars, seemed no bigger than a child's. Indeed, with every drop of the thermometer, they had the appearance of shrinking further into their clothes, so that presently there would remain nothing but headless bodies of men.

Steam from the gaily singing kettle added grayness to the smoke-laden atmosphere of the room. Glasses of hot Scotch stood beside each player. The flip-flip and the shuffle of cards, a monosyllabic raise or a disgusted grunt as some one threw down his hand, were the only sounds, other than the clink of chips, inside the cabin. The game had started boisterously enough, but as the hours passed, silence settled over the little group. Hilarity died, crushed by some unseen, subtle and insidious influence, and early morning found six men engaged in the serious business of freezing one another out.

It was Delany who had sapped the sport from the game and reduced it to a calculating endeavor to make money. At first, the boys had lost to him carelessly, but, when they discovered a marked disinclination on his part to reciprocate, they united in an effort to lower his pile to a level with the table.

By the time this was accomplished, it was impossible to restore the original temper of the game.

For each man had begun to feel a resentment toward his companions, to suspect that they were banded against him just as he had been banded with them against Delany, and settled himself to the business of protecting his own with an earnestness which was almost savage.

Delany, who preferred a warm back to a blistered face, had chosen a seat in front of the stove. He preserved a semblance of slenderness, wearing but three sweaters, and these very fine ones, under a wine-colored velveteen jacket.

He was a very fair man, a little over medium height and giving an impression of delicacy and breeding. He had pale yellow hair which he constantly smoothed with the palms of his hand. A Van Dyke beard gave to his colorless face a look of asceticism. His movements were quick, at times to jerkiness, and his abnormally long fingers were never still. They had the effect of exploring into everything, as an insect feels its way with sensitive antennæ.

He arranged his cards in a tiny fan with only the tips of the corners visible in an incredibly short space of time; then his eyes darted to the faces of his com-

panions as though trying to read in them the story of each hand. When he dealt, it seemed almost as though he hoped to gain a knowledge of the spots through the tips of his fingers.

Cavendish and Farnum sat beside him; the former was an Englishman in his early twenties, who months ago had overcome Dawson's prejudice against the "remittance man" and who was a typical example of the men who made the North-West Mounted Police Force unique in the history of law and order.

He was a careless player, too careless for poker. He held his cards loosely and sat so that, by twisting his neck ever so slightly, Delany could look directly into his hand. His whole attitude expressed the thought . . . "But my dear chap, if one can't play as a gentleman, why play?" He would have scorned to stoop to trickery in the winning of a game.

His usually brilliant color was heightened by excitement, and he touched his cheeks impatiently every now and then as though fretted at their burning. He lost without venom but with a hint of contempt as though the struggle were not quite worth while. He might have been thinking, "If I had you men on the Rugby field, I would soon put you in your places."

Farnum was stocky at his slenderest moments, but, protected from the Yukon cold, he looked something like a turtle when its head protrudes beyond its shell. He was the sort of man who, winning or losing, explained his play, much to the annoyance of the others at the table. "You might have thought I was crazy to hold the queen, John and nine spot," he would say, "but I reasoned that my chances were—" It pleased him to be considered an immensely subtle player.

Buck sat beside him, dwarfing every other man in the room. The intense cold and the blistering heat from the glowing stove had whipped his cheeks to a beefy red which seemed hot enough to singe his grizzled beard. He attacked the game much as he would have gone at a stubbornly unyielding piece of ground with pick and shovel. He and Farnum were the first to resent Delany's attitude and they displayed the most determined fighting front.

McCool, torn between anger and the demands of hospitality, and Kleath, watching Delany with more suspicion than he usually showed toward his fellow men, completed the circle.

"The cards weren't shuffled," cried Buck, throwing his hand on the table. "A new deal."

"To h— with a new deal," answered Delany, who

had dealt. "Pick up your cards and draw. How many?"

"I tell you I saw you deal the cards without shuffling. I've got the same spots I had last time."

"You've got the same chances as the rest of us," broke in Eddie Farnum, who had three tens. "Give me two cards."

"I ain't so sure of that," growled Bill.

Delany laid down the pack and turned violently toward him.

"What did you say?" he demanded, in a tone of enforced smoothness.

"I said it," returned Bill, aggressively, "and if it sticks in anybody's craw, I hope they'll choke."

The men shifted in their chairs, some leaning forward over the table as though waiting their opportunity to get into the quarrel, others leaning back as though unwilling to be drawn into it.

Kleath looked on curiously. He had heard and read of card fights, but he never imagined that he would take part in one. The tensity of the room, strangely enough, seemed to have slackened, just as the peculiar keyed-up sensation, which usually precedes a severe electric storm, slackens once the thunder clears the air. The situation was wholly unreal to him, at the same time being intensely vivid.

The chip-sprinkled, card-littered, glass-laden table . . . five men staring at one another in various attitudes of fury or watchfulness . . . the room wavering behind streaks of dense smoke . . . and on the mud-chinked walls, Barney's bizarre art collection, covers of various saucy magazines, bulging and straining at their tacks, like sails filling in a breeze. The unaffected singing of the kettle filled the gaps between heavily indrawn breaths.

Kleath imagined himself at the theatre . . . he watched for some man to rise, seize a chair and crash it against the table. He fancied the splintering of glass at which signal an orchestra would burst into violent music, men would spring at one another's throats, the lights would go out, and through a storm of applause, a voice would cry " . . . Good God, I've killed him! " Then the curtain would drop, leaving him on the outside of the drama.

" Listen! " warned Cavendish, cocking his head on one side.

A wild scream rose above the howling of the wind. Muffled at first it grew to piercing shrillness and each shriek seemed to bring it nearer the cabin.

" A woman," said Barney, throwing open the door and peering into the dense yellow curtain of the fog.

A blast of ice-laden wind rushed into the room,

scattering cards and whirling every movable article about on its mad course. The lamps shuddered and flared dangerously, but no one heeded them. Their attention was riveted upon an insufficiently-clad figure which hurtled into the cabin and fell gasping to the floor.

"What is it?" asked Buck, as he stooped to sort out the woman from the rags which partly covered her.

"Mrs. Wade, as shure as Oi'm an Oirishman," exclaimed Barney. "Well, byes, an' what do ye make of that?"

"You'll make a corpse of it," answered Kleath, "if you don't give her a drink and shut the door." He started at the work of resuscitation. "She's as nearly frozen as I ever want to be."

In a short time, however, Mrs. Wade, a half-breed who enjoyed the distinction of being the poorest resident of Dawson, revived sufficiently to explain her presence there. The heat of the room and the heroic doses of hot Scotch administered to her precluded any degree of coherency in her story, but finally they understood what she was trying to tell them.

"Pinkie . . ." she mumbled. "Wantshquiltsh — chil — reshbedsh . . . carry me — out, so!"

She indicated her scant attire and feet which were bare save for an old pair of woolen socks. "Lock — maybe burn. . . ."

"Pinkie was cold," translated Kleath, "and tried to take the quilts from the children's beds. Is that it? And you would not let him take them — yes? So, he picked you up and put you outside and locked the door. Is that right? And you want us to put you back in the house for fear the children will freeze or he will do them some harm. Is that it?"

The woman made frantic, affirmative gestures, and got unsteadily to her feet. "You make him open th' door," she said. "Knock on head, and he sl-sl-sleep till to-morrow. Hurry . . . hurry!"

She dragged him in a zig-zag course to the door and flung it open. He broke away long enough to pick up his coat and throw it around the astonished woman's shoulders. Then they disappeared into the night.

"Jackass!" exclaimed Delany. "Never could stand those grandstand plays, myself."

"Might as well be moving too," said Cavendish, after a moment. "It won't be easy to get her home."

"By George — another hero!" laughed Delany. "Any one else volunteer?"

"Shure —" Barney was already getting into his coat. "An' Oi'm goin' to take a coat av some sort to put around that damn-fool bye — God bless him!"

The result was that all six men fought their way toward the Wade cabin, stumbling, slipping and falling on the snow-covered trail. Sometimes they groped through fog so thick that it gagged them. Sometimes they leaned their weight against a wind so strong that it sucked the breath from their lungs and pumped needles of ice into their throats. Their nostrils froze, and icicles formed on their beards and on their lashes. Inches seemed like yards; yards like miles. More than once they thought they had lost the trail. But that peculiar sense which was a heritage from her forefathers, guarded Mrs. Wade and she led them with only a few deviations to her home, dark, silent, inhospitable.

"We'll burst open the door," said Buck, stamping about like some prehistoric monster and making great sweeping circles with his arms. "Get out of the way, boys. Here goes."

But the woman threw herself against him and cried shrilly,

"No, no! For God-sake, don't! Scare Pinkie — he do awful thing!"

"Yes, I suppose she's right," said Buck. "But how the devil are we to get in without making a noise?"

No one answered, and the wind, tossing clouds of fog about, howled its derision at them.

"You are all fools," shouted Delany. "Come back, out of this cold. Bring the woman and let her stay in the cabin. In the morning maybe her dutiful boy may have come to his senses. But it's certain death to stay here."

"I'm inclined to believe you," bellowed Eddie Farnum. "I feel as though I had just two more minutes to live."

If the children's beds had been stripped of their coverings, there was no chance of their living through the night. If a sudden and violent entrance to the cabin were effected, Pinkie would have ample opportunity to take a horrible revenge before the men could get their bearings in the dark and overpower him. They could not abandon the children, they hardly cared to risk bursting open the door. They certainly could not stand outside in the cold. The wind suddenly dropped to a low whine, and the fog enfolded them once more.

Kleath, although standing quite close to Mrs. Wade, could not see her. He could not even dis-

tinguish her outline. "Can you get me a nail?" he asked.

She fumbled around the window sill and, presently finding his hand, thrust a large rusty screw into it.

Barney and Bill Buck managed to shield the flare from a match at intervals while he undertook to pick the lock. At first the pain in his gloveless fingers, groping against cold metal, was almost unbearable. He sympathized with the men who cursed and stamped about. He urged them to go back to Barney's cabin.

"Ye'll freeze yer poor fingers, Chris," Barney kept moaning, "an' ye'll niver open the door with a nail, Bye, without anny feelin' in yer fingers. Shure, Oi'm no locksmith, but Oi can tell ye that."

Kleath was almost of a mind to believe him. A soothing numbness took the place of acute pain, however, and he resolved not to give up until his fingers refused to grip the screw. Round and round it turned, up and down he moved it, conscious of a catch once in a while but conscious also that he had missed one certain spot. . . .

He squeezed the fingers of his right hand hard about the little bit of steel with the fingers of his left hand and gave a desperate jerk. The key on the other side fell to the floor with a clatter. The

lock turned and in a moment more the door swung quietly back and the men trooped into the cabin.

Pinkie was sleeping peacefully under the coverings from all the other beds. Tears were frozen on the children's pinched, blue cheeks. Their skin was hard to the touch. "Done for," announced Delany. "What can you expect with an imbecile like that at large?"

But the children were not done for. They were rubbed back to consciousness and howling discomfort. A blazing fire and lavish draughts of well-stewed tea diffused a reasonable warmth and, at an hour which should have brought daylight, the men prepared to set out once more.

They received Mrs. Wade's thanks with gruff awkwardness and an evident desire to get beyond the reach of her gratitude. Delany was the last to pass out, and he stopped to insert the key in the door. The lock had been in nowise damaged.

Just before they dispersed, he turned to Kleath.

"I must congratulate you," he said. "That was a remarkably deft job."

CHAPTER V

Dawson received the story of Kleath's exploit variously. There were many, who, like Clare Meredith, regarded it more as a fortunate accident than a tell-tale revelation. "Wouldn't he be a pitiable idiot," she asked Delany, as he sipped her excellent tea, strongly flavored with rum, on the following afternoon, "wouldn't he be utterly mad to betray himself in that way, if there *were* anything in it? Do give the man credit for a grain of common sense, my dear. I could tolerate a clever scamp, but a stupid lout — pshaw, you don't know Kleath!"

There was Duke, on the other hand, who chose to consider intimacy with a lock suspiciously significant and as corroborative of his former opinion.

"'Tisn't as if he just happened to get the door open," remarked the foreman of the *Yukon World* to the small crowd which had gathered round the stove in the "San Domingo." "That lad was confabbing with an old friend. He's plum chummy with locks — he is! He knew well enough that he

could operate on any ordinary combination with a rusty screw; this wasn't what you might call pioneer work. And don't you forget the trifling circumstance that he was working in a fog as thick as a rhinoceros hide, with a handful of frozen fingers. What do you take me for, anyway? Huh!"

There were others, who, like Barney McCool and Goldie Meadows, wished with passionate intensity that Kleath's sympathy for the Wade family had not led him to perform an act which gave Dawson, in general, and Joe Duke, in particular, an excuse for converting mere speculation into definite accusation.

"Shure an' ye make me sick with yer Sherlock Holmes drivell," sneered the former. "Anny wan would think to hear ye talk, Duke, that openin' a dure was wan of the sivin wunders av the wur-ruld! Why, Oi knew a fellow who turned a patent lock with a toothpick, an' it's hiven's own truth Oi'm tellin' ye! In Stamboul it was, an' Oi an' this other fellow were there riprisintin'—well, niver moind that just now . . . it had something to do with a certain Governmint an' the circumstance is not even yet fer publication . . . but annyway, a Pasha, whose name Oi could mintion, had in his harem a gur-rul who took me fri'nd's fancy. Belave me,

his ravin's were somethin' terrible to hear! However, his tender sentiments were reciprocated after the fashion av the country, an' a good deal of love-note writin' ensued while the affinities were arrangin' to give old Pasha the slip an' make fer Paradise . . . av their own choosin'!

Barney stopped, as a fit of coughing choked the words in his throat, but he managed to continue before any one could spoil his story.

"Their idea was simple, an' it held very little danger — fer the other fellow. For me — well, young people in love rarely consider them that don't happen to be! 'You kape the Tur-ruk well entertained,' says Terrence to me, 'whoile Oi go after the lady. Don't advance anny objections,' says he, 'fer ye can do it an' only *you* can . . . a prince av entertainers,' says Terrence, 'an' an entertainer av princes!' Shure, Terry Muldoon (he was an Oirishman, same as mesilf) always had a saft wur-rud an' a bit av the Blarney fer me. Poor bye! Well, to proceed — Oi smokes about forty-foive hookahs with His Nibs, Oi dhrank enough black, syrupy coffee to sink the whole av the British Navy, entoire, Oi applauded his dancin' gur-ruls till me hands were numb, an' the long an' short av it was, that Terry pulled off his part av the job without

trouble or interference. He opened that lock . . . a patent arrangement," Barney broke off to explain, "that some smart Yank brought over there an' ripsinted as bein' the foinest thing on the market to reduce the expinse in eunuchs, an' the Tur-ruks with big harems fell fer 'em by the dozen — well, Terry opened that patent lock with as little trouble as he would have had in turnin' the handle av a dure. Now, moind . . . here is the point av the story — he figgered that he would use his tie pin to pick the catch, but whoile we three were havin' dinner — mesilf, Terrence an' His Nibs, the latter admired that pin so extravagant-loike, that Terry, the generous fool that he was, took it off an' gave it to him! Can ye b'at that? It may be that he thought when all was said an' done, old Pasha would look at that pin an' feel that, afther all, he had not got the wur-rust av the bargain. . . . Av course Terrance Muldoon niver put it that way to me; no fellow in love would. But there's manny a thought lurkin' in the back av yer head so quiet-loike, ye don't know it's there, till somebody tells ye! Now, listen to this, will ye? Whin Terrence Muldoon came face to face with that lock, he found he had nothing on himsilf sharper than a toothpick . . . so he opened the dure with that! Therefore, ye see what can be done

by a man with ab-so-damn-lute-ly no experience whatever, an' not even a rusty screw!"

He swept the circle with a fiercely challenging eye.

"Oh, Barney," breathed Tess and Goldie in chorus, "did they escape?"

"Escape?" echoed the story-teller. "Well that shows ye didn't know Terrence Muldoon! Av course they escaped an' would be livin' happily to-day, if they weren't dead . . . God rest their souls in p'ace! Shure an' it was a black day fer me when Terry was planted. Oi wasn't even at the wake, an' he was me partner in the claim Oi've got beyant the creeks —"

"Lord," interrupted Duke, unsympathetically, "don't go over that claim dream again, Barney! Honest, my ears are crammed so full they're just dripping over. I can't listen to another thing. But there's an awful hollow down my throat somewhere, and if you'll promise not to tell another of your lies to-night, I'll stand you a drink. Come on, boys!"

With the unfailing obedience that command always enforces, the men of the group repaired to the elbow-polished counter and the brass rail. Barney took the precaution to place his whiskey-neat beyond the possibility of recall and then announced

triumphantly, "Well, just the same, that was no lie Oi was tellin' ye!"

The minutes were punctuated by the opening and closing of the big door at the end of the "Hall." Men panted in, exhaling great drifts of gray which dispersed only as they drew near the glowing stoves. Their clothing was so strongly impregnated with cold, that even the most unpopular girls would not dance with them until a modicum of warmth had permeated their outer garments.

"Dance with you, Eddie Farnum?" cried a fat blonde called "Dutchie." "Why, I'd as lief dance with a polar bear! Talk about your cold embrace of Death—Br-r-r!" She turned wrathfully toward the door as a gust of wind swirled her skirts about her and prickled her coarse arms in gooseflesh. Then, recognizing the newcomer, she clapped her hands and whooped with delight. "Come into the bosom of the family, Bright Eyes," she yelled across the room. "We wuz jes' tryin' a little of the absent treatment, an' seein' if we couldn't bring you. I gotta dance in cold storage fer you as soon as you want it."

It was Kleath.

He went infrequently to the "San Domingo," as attendance was measured in Dawson, preferring his

books and the companionship of Weatherby to the more robust pleasures of the "Hall." But on this particular evening, after Weatherby had gone to the plant, Kleath found his hotel bedroom just about as homelike as a morgue. A devastating loneliness ate into him and he could not reason it away. A sudden craving for the warmth of a room overheated with the steam from human bodies, for the glare of a room over-lighted with many smoking, odorous lamps, for the effervescent din of a room over-gay with the noise of virile enjoyment gripped him and sent him out into the yellowish fog-choked street and on to the "San Domingo."

His welcome, always flattering, fell just short, on this occasion, of being a full-fledged ovation. Girls hung round his neck with a superb disregard for his icy clothing. Men grasped his swollen, frost-bitten hands in a clasp which made him wince. The musicians, catching the spirit of the company, broke off in the middle of a febrile waltz and crashed out the boisterous strains of "He's a Jolly Good Fellow."

Only Duke, sinking rapidly into his cups, and Delany, watching with unwavering attention the clattering course of the little silver ball on the roulette wheel, forebore a share in the general greeting.

"Make your play, gentlemen," droned Ben Tisdale. "Make your play! Make your — Welcome to our city," he broke off, catching sight of Kleath's head as it towered above the throng of girls who pressed close about him. "Come over an' tell me what's doing on the 'Outside'!"

"Why, look who's here," cried Meadows, waddling out from behind the bar and surveying him with a beaming smile. "Everything all smooth-loike in the plant?"

Kleath shook a solemn head. "About as smooth as the course of true love," he said. "In fact I came over to break the news to you, Tim, although that's not part of my job. You see, Tim, the paper will be held up for a week or two while —"

"Held up?" Meadows's blankness of expression changed to one of sorrowing despair. "Oi thought so . . . too good to be true. An' d'ye mean to say that we won't have a copy, reg'lar?"

The proprietor collapsed into his belt as it were.

"Of course," explained Kleath, cheerfully, "all the subscribers will get a rebate; and the advertisers, too. You won't lose —"

"But what in the name of St. Michael could hold up a paper if it wasn't run by a lot of farmers?" thundered Meadows, recovering from the force of

the blow. "Shure, an' suppose Oi'd close the bar — Oi niver heard tell av annything so . . ." He broke into a stream of profanity which curdled the atmosphere.

"Dad, hush!" begged Goldie, laying her finger against the long upper lip of her indignant parent. "Look at Chris! Don't you see he's only teasing you?"

Emotions passed over the Irishman's face like smoke across the sky, black at first, then gradually lightening until a radiant smile shone out as brightly as the summer sun.

"Gosh," he breathed heavily, "Oi was shure you were in earnest, Bye! Take the advice av an old man, Kleath, an' don't try none av yer practical jokes on a nervous organization. Me constitution ain't what it used to be, an' a shock is loikely to go bad with me. Besides, Oi've known a man to be shot fer less than that. What'll ye have, Son?"

Kleath swung Tiny Tess up into his arms.

"I'll have a bold, dashing two-step with this baby," he said, "and later, when I've contracted a sufficient thirst to make it worth while, I'll look you up. Save me some dances, girls!" he called over his shoulder. "If Tess doesn't step on my foot

and crush me, I'll give each of you a treat in a minute."

"Diamond Tooth" Lizzie looked after the queerly assorted pair and a softness crept into her handsome face.

"Gee," she breathed, pensively, "I bet that boy's mother just adored him. I wonder if he —"

"Little One," interrupted "Big Bill" Buck, "I'm goin' to lead you off to one of them gallery boxes and a quart of the fizzy stuff. If you've got any of the sentimental pearls to fling about, I want to be on hand to catch 'em and put 'em where they'll do the most good. Kleath out yonder don't hear all the pretty things you say, so you'd better smear 'em over me. I can stand more honeyed language than anybody you run acrost. Say, Liz," he bent lower over her copper-colored head, "I'm awful lonely up there in my shack. It's a heap too big fer me, an' yet I had a notion of buildin' a reel swell house, somehow. The Eureka Mine is so full of pay dirt, honest, Lizzie, the boys wash about a hundred dollars off their hands every time they go near the pump or the basin. It's a sin fer a fella like me to have all that money an' nobody to spend it on. Couldn't you loosen up a little of that sentiment fer me, Liz? I'll pester till you give in; I'm that sort of a brute."

They had reached the little gallery compartment and in due course sat behind two glasses of Meadows's best champagne.

"What's your hurry, Bill?"

"Holy potatoes," cried the old miner. "I've been askin' you every day fer the last six weeks an' you got the nerve to ask me what's the hurry! Why, I'll be planted if you wait much longer, that's one reason. Are you set on marryin' a corpse?"

She looked at his great strong frame with the admiration every woman feels for virility and force, and she laughed.

"You're good for twenty years, yet, Bill," she said.

"Not if I gotta pine fer something I want as bad as I do you," he warned her. "I'll go off just like that . . . an' if anything happens to me, mind, you'll be responsible."

Again she laughed, displaying the last gift of the defunct Lawson to great advantage. Uneasy as to its brilliance, however, she removed a bit of chamois from her handkerchief, and, with unrivalled *aplomb*, set to work at polishing the gem.

"Lord," growled Buck, aflame with loverlike jealousy, "you needn't be so darned careful of that shiner. I'll hang 'em all over you, Kid. You can

have your pillers stuffed with di'monds if you've got a fancy fer 'em. Say, Liz," he seized her in his great embrace, passionately, "you're the only woman I ever wanted, and I want you so bad, you're worth your weight in gold to me."

She made a little gasping protest and he released her as suddenly as he had gathered her to him.

"Lizzie Lawson," he said, solemnly, emphasizing each word with a blow of his huge fist upon the table, "I tell you, you're worth your weight in gold, an' if you don't believe it, just you step into the bank to-morrer at 2 P. M. and doggone me if I don't prove it! I'll balance you pound for pound in dust, with a di'mond throwed in! Will you come?"

"Sure, Bill," Lizzie laughed excitedly. "I'll call your bluff. But you can take it from me, Old Man, that you ain't gettin' no holiday bargain. I'd be cheap at half the price!"

Kleath gave himself up to the distraction of the moment with an abandon as complete as it was unusual. The riotous friendliness of the place cheered him, the warm pressure of a woman's body against his own soothed him. He looked at the "San Domingo" and its ilk for the first time with eyes of appreciation instead of toleration, and a nebulous

thought floated through his mind — how welcome would a dram of this frank joyousness be in the melancholy homes of the grimly respectable! What a diminution in the exodus therefrom, and in how much less degree would these Temples of Pleasure flourish!

The second time Tess stumbled against him, he lifted her up bodily and bore her off to the gallery.

She sank gratefully into a big chair and closed her blue-circled eyes. Her face was dead white and she wore no rouge.

"Why, child," exclaimed Kleath with concern, "I've tired you out! Why didn't you tell me I was fagging you? You are not going to faint, are you?"

"I'm thirsty," she answered. "Couldn't we have a highball?"

If she saw his astonishment, she made no comment or explanation as to her descent from the water wagon. Tess and Goldie had stood together on the temperance platform, a remarkable stand for the former, at least, whose weekly earnings were bound to be decreased on that account. Now, she gulped her whiskey and soda as though hoping to find in each burning mouthful the Magic which would infuse Life into her listless body.

"Feel better?" asked Kleath, as a faint flush rose in her cheeks.

"Yes, thanks," she forced herself to smile. "It is the long winter, the hideous cold and the awful darkness. . . . It saps all the strength I have and I just go to pieces. Sometimes I wish I could die, I hate it so. Depressing companion, don't you think?"

"But, my dear girl," Kleath sat on the arm of her chair and patted her thin shoulder, "if that's the condition you are in, you ought to be at home in bed, instead of being here at work."

"Must!"

"That is shortsighted policy. The result will be a breakdown; then you will have to take a holiday! Better rest now. Of course I know that my advice would have much more weight if it were backed up with a large fat check, but isn't it worth anything 'just simply'?"

The girl shook her head. Her hand travelled to the pouch stuffed with blue tickets which she wore at her waist. Her gesture suggested an unconsciously earnest desire to fill it. "I wish I could keep right on dancing and drinking like Lizzie," she sighed.

The orchestra leaped into a mazurka but Tess did not move.

"I am going to pick you up and take you home," said Kleath. "You are not able to stand, much less to dance."

He gathered her frail little body into his arms just as the door opened and Delany appeared on the threshold.

"The leisured moments of the idle rich," he commented, with a laugh which grated on Kleath's nerves. "Don't let me disturb you," he continued, as Tess was put upon her feet. "I only came up to borrow a dollar or two, Tessie. Have you cashed in, yet, my dear?"

"No, not yet."

"Well, I have just run out of change. If you will give me some of those checks, I will turn them over to Meadows and get the equivalent in cash. My spell of good luck is just beginning. Made a killing a moment ago, but unfortunately Farnum was at my elbow to garnishee my winnings. Now I am even and have every idea of bringing home the gold by pack mule before morning."

The girl pulled out a handful of tickets and held them toward him.

"Oh, you little miser!" He caught her round the waist and held her while he rifled the contents of the bag. "What can a fellow do with a pittance

like that when he is going to break the bank? 'To him that hath'—dear child. Thanks!"

"But Medford . . ." began Tess in a low voice.

"Yes?" He turned at the doorway, impatiently.

"I would like to keep a little of that for 'Doc.' I owe him some money."

Delany laughed, with genuine mirth this time. "Pay old Meredith?" he echoed. "What an idea! Why, he doesn't expect it, Honey; it would only embarrass him. Now, Tim Meadows is different." His tone changed slightly as he added, "You know what I mean."

She sighed and he left them.

"I must get back to work," she said, resolutely. "I have no more money and I *am going to pay* 'Doc'! Thanks for the drink, Chris. Are you coming?"

Kleath pushed her gently into her chair. "We will call this a dance," he said, "for I want to talk to you like a 'Dutch uncle,' my dear. Tell me the solemn truth, Tess, do you love Delany?"

She struggled feebly to get away from him.

"I won't answer you," she cried. "It is none of your business."

"You have answered me," said Kleath. "Now be still and listen. . . . Why don't you leave him?"

Into her eyes there leaped for an instant the hope which was born of a fierce desire, but she beat it back.

"I couldn't — I couldn't — I couldn't!"

"You could and you should."

"No, no! That would only be another sin. I — I — you wouldn't understand, but I feel —" she covered her face with her hands and the words were muffled — "I feel quite married to him."

"There are married women who are obliged to leave their husbands," Kleath remarked.

There was a short silence while she seemed to play with the thought.

"What would I do then?" she asked.

"Why — er — just the same as any one else." He was not prepared to answer that offhand, and he looked out into the "Hall."

"How cruel of you!" She hammered him with her impotent little fists. "How shamefully cruel! You know I couldn't belong to just anybody — like — like — well, like Olie Oleson." She shuddered and fell to sobbing.

"Good God, child!" cried Kleath, horror-stricken at the misconception she had put upon his words. "I did not mean *that*! I mean that you could do what other — divorced — women do."

"They usually take on some one else," she said, bitterly. Then, raising a tear-blotched, miserable little face, "Chris, would you like to have me?"

He recoiled with the same sensation he would have felt at hearing purple blasphemy from the mouth of a lovely child. Tess offered him her soul as she might have offered him a pretty, bruised, white flower.

"Why couldn't you go home?" He ignored her question.

"Home? Me go back home?" she laughed and cried in the same breath. "Back to the tiny parsonage of a country village, to a swarm of sisters who dress alike and never smile on Sundays, to an atmosphere of vicious virtue and to be tortured by listening to eternal prayers for the reclamation of my soul? To sit in outer darkness and know that no amount of repentance could bring a ray of light and kindness to me? Thank you, I would rather commit suicide right here."

"Hush! I don't like to hear you speak like that. The suggestion was made only because I want to help you and to see you the happy little girl you must have been when you first came to Dawson. I could help you to get away, but as long as you stay here —"

“— My case is beyond you,” she interrupted, dabbing her eyes. “I know. I have thought and thought and thought — I am not such a baby as I seem. I am a woman of the world . . . a foully wicked woman.”

The accusation sounded grotesque from her lips; her whole being denied it. Gentleness, the great gift of forbearance, a sweet disposition, charity toward all the world and a sporting determination to take Life's upper-cuts, standing — these formed an armor for Tess's soul through which all the Scarlet Letters in the universe were powerless to pierce.

There was a raucous blast of music from below, and a loud knock on the door, closely followed by Len Cavendish.

“I ought to arrest you for kidnapping,” he cried. “I have been looking for Tess all evening.”

“Arrest me, Len,” said Tess. “I kept him. Good-by,” she smiled from the doorway. “I am ever so grateful to you, Chris, and I feel a thousand times better.”

Kleath, left alone, found himself fascinated by the desire to wring a man's neck. Then, subduing that hot flame with a dash of cold reason, he sought and found Goldie.

She sat, as was her custom, apart, but not haughtily

aloof from the revellers. In her hand was one of the books Kleath had given her. She closed it over her finger as he approached and gave him a little nod of welcome. "I thought you had gone home," she said.

"I have been talking to Tess."

Goldie looked at him with quick understanding. "Isn't it heartbreaking?" she said.

"I suppose no one other than an archbishop could persuade her that she would be justified in leaving him?" suggested Kleath.

"No. And the more she wants to go, the more surely she will not, feeling that she must bear her punishment to the utmost."

"And he probably knows this?"

"Perfectly."

"The hound! I saw him take her money, to-night. How long has this been going on?"

"Since before you came. At first, he seemed to have a little money, and, as far as we could tell, he was rather kind to her. Then, he gambled and lost until there was nothing left and she had to provide for both of them. Now, even what Tess makes does not keep him straight with Dad. I overheard Dad tell Ben Tisdale to send him into Coventry to-night if he did not redeem some of his tabs."

"What do you mean?"

"Why," explained Goldie, "in any of the halls, tabs — I O U's — will be accepted up to a certain amount, depending on a man's salary, or his dump, or his ability to pay in any way, you know. When he has exhausted his credit, he is sent into Coventry, which means that the doors of that hall are closed against him and, when one closes, they all generally follow suit to avoid being let in for the same thing. It is serious, especially in the winter, when a man can't get a drop of whiskey or get in off the street to keep warm. Besides, there is the disgrace and the loss of a form of amusement. Medford Delany would not have the ghost of a show at the other halls, if Dad closed him out."

"But I should think that would be the best thing which could happen to him," said Kleath, "at least for Tess's sake. What she makes would be ample for them to live on, once his gambling stopped."

"You must not forget, though," the girl reminded him, "what the long winter would mean with no amusement of this sort. If he were sent into Coventry, how would he spend his leisure hours and how would he treat Tess?"

"You think he would brood and perhaps turn against her for not making enough to keep pace with

his expenditure? Hah! That is a peculiar twist for gratitude to take!"

"She has hinted as much to me when asking me to use my influence with Dad to increase his credit."

"Well, suppose she did," said Kleath, "do you mean that we must sit here and do nothing while she kills herself for that brute? Why, I would murder him, first."

"I think and think," said Goldie. "I have had hundreds of plans but they are no good. You see, she feels different from most people."

"She is too sick to be dancing to-night. You can see it in her eyes."

"She hasn't been like herself for a long time," answered Goldie. "I think she is worrying about Len."

"Why should she worry about Cavendish? I should think her own troubles were sufficient."

"Ah, but you see, Len's troubles are hers, too. He is awfully in love with her and he would marry her to-morrow."

"Is that true?"

"Quite true."

"And she won't marry him because — well, it wouldn't be fair to him?"

Goldie nodded. "Every one knows that," she said.

"I shall talk to her again," said Kleath. "And I shall keep on talking until she becomes reasonable. Lord, I wish a few of the women I have known, society women, could take lessons from her! But come — there's a waltz. Will you dance it with me?"

He took her in his arms as though he would protect her and the fair young womanhood she embodied from all the Delanys of the world. She felt his arms tighten about her, with a delicious happiness such as she had never known; and so, among, yet not of, that motley gathering the two danced, silently, absorbed in one another.

A commotion at the door jerked them back to the reality of the "Hall." Olie Oleson, very dirty, very drunk and dragging a woman by the arm, pushed his way into the center of the room, roaring for Meadows.

"W'at you t'ink?" he appealed impartially to the crowd. "Ah ban coom in de dure, an' Ah fin', dees woomun k-nock on de dure! She ban ver' po-lite, w'at? K-nock on dees dure! She cold — say Teem — won't you geev her a dreenk?"

The woman was a stranger, whether half-breed or Indian it was difficult to determine. Her skin was the color of copper; her hair, what little showed under a peculiar headdress, was black, and her eyes, glittering like those of a serpent, were as black as sloes. Her costume was bizarre even for the "Hall."

The pose of bold assurance she had assumed was shaken for an instant as she faced the room. But something in the open ridicule of the girls, something in the puzzled scrutiny of the men, something in the frank curiosity of Goldie and Kleath, who stood comparatively near, must have stimulated her. For she recovered herself quickly, and, giving a reckless laugh, she thrust her arm through that of the Swede, and pulled him toward the bar.

"Strong breeze from the hills, to-night," commented Cavendish, as he and Tess walked past.

"Animal, vegetable or mineral?" inquired Barney, in a loud whisper. "Shure an' at fur-rust, Oi thought it was me old mustard plaster come to loife! Ain't Olie a divil with the gur-ruls?"

"Looks like a pair of devils, if you ask me," replied Farnum, with a laugh.

The woman haunted Kleath. Whether he danced or sat still, she was somewhere near, not exactly

looking at him, but boring into him with her strange black eyes. Even Goldie commented upon it.

"Why does she look at you that way?" she asked. "Do you know her?"

"Not guilty. But it is certainly embarrassing, isn't it? I can almost imagine myself under a microscope being dissected."

"Come upstairs into one of the boxes," suggested Goldie; "she can't follow you, there."

They rose. To reach the gallery it was necessary to pass Olie and his companion; it was also necessary to pass the doorway leading to Tim Meadows's private office—the room into which Kleath had been dragged on the memorable night of his fight with Joe Duke.

They came opposite the couple and, simultaneously, the orchestra crashed out the strains of a violent two-step. The woman left her seat, hesitated the fraction of a second, then rushed at Kleath and flung her arms about his neck.

"You will dance with me, now, won't you?" she breathed into his face.

In an instant Olie Oleson was on his feet and had gained her side.

"You ban my girl," he said, jealously. "You no dance wiz heem. You b'long to me, now. W'at?"

"Let me go!" cried the woman, wrenching herself free and again appealing to Kleath. "Take me away from him," she begged in a low voice.

With the ferocity of an animal, the Swede seized her in his arms and kissed her; her hair, her eyes, her lips, her bare neck. To the wild strains of the dance he repeated savagely, "You ban my girl, now. You b'long to me; you no b'long to heem."

From the revolting sight Kleath and Goldie turned away. They reached the door and were passing on to the gallery steps, when from behind them came the sound of a suppressed cry, a heavy fall, followed by the impact of a flying body which drove them forward and into the dimly-lighted little passage. Before they realized what had happened, the key was turned in the lock and they stood face to face with Olie Oleson's strange companion.

"Get me away from here, quick!" she panted. "He is so drunk that I managed to push him down, but he is not hurt and will burst through this door after me in a second. Quick — get me away, don't you hear?"

She clutched Goldie by the hand and dragged her into her father's room. "Isn't there a way out at the back? Listen . . ." as a determined pounding commenced upon the door. . . . "He will break it

in a minute. . . . Save me from the horrible brute — don't you see. . . . I *must* be saved! ”

Goldie's fur coat and outdoor moccasins lay on a nearby chair, and, even as the woman was speaking, she put them on her. A peculiar look had come over her face, quite unlike the bewilderment which was written all over Kleath.

“Why, who the devil are you?” he bluntly asked.

“She is Mrs. Meredith,” answered Goldie. “You unhook the storm window and put her out through there! Hurry, Chris! I will keep Olie from rousing the whole ‘Hall.’ ”



CHAPTER VI

"The Princess has a racking case of nerves, but she would like to see you."

Meredith stood, black bag in hand, hurry in his manner and anxiety in his voice, on the threshold of Kleath's room. "Nothing more natural in the world," he went on, "for a girl of her temperament who spends so much time alone and who has nothing special to do. I wish she could find some of these women more companionable. Now I think that there are quite a lot of fine women out here. Unfortunately, however, I am afraid that Clare looks for something as superior as herself, and heaven knows such another one is not to be found. It isn't as though she had a couple of kiddies to fuss over—" he pulled himself up sharply,— "but it is a mercy that she has not, for any one with an atom of sense knows that to bring up a child out here would rack a nervous woman to bits. Besides, there's nothing more insane," he put a note of intense professionalism into his voice, "there's nothing more insane, than to take it for

granted that every woman ought to be a mother. . . . Then you will go, Kleath? Thanks, Old Man. That *is* a load off my mind!"

"Glad to," lied Kleath, "if Mrs. Meredith thinks I will be an antidote for nerves. Where are you off?"

"Oh, half a dozen places. Pneumonia, mostly. Heaven only knows when I shall be back! You know, it is simply desperate — this leaving Clare so much alone. Why, I have not been home before two o'clock in the morning since — since — well, I don't remember just when, and you, yourself, know what the meals are like."

"She ought to go away for a while," suggested Kleath.

Meredith shifted his bag to the other hand as though welcoming the obligation which made it necessary for him to linger a moment to discuss this topic.

"That's just the trouble," he said. "She won't hear of going — bless her heart! She is afraid I would forget to eat or dress or sleep or something, if she were not here. There was a time when she wanted to go, when she hated Dawson, but now — I say, Kleath, did you ever consider the wonder of a woman's power to make sacrifices for you — to

learn to hate the things she loved and to love the things she hated? Look at Clare — ready to stay here, just for me!”

He paused, cleared his throat and shifted the bag again.

“You know, Old Man, sometimes the thought that I can never repay her, grows positively intolerable and I —” he laughed shamefacedly — “deliberately impose hardships upon myself in a fool sort of effort to even things up a bit. The other night — last night, it was — I could have stayed out at Bonanza and could have driven home with ‘Twilight’ Toby in the morning. But I walked back. . . . I walked pretty nearly all night, and I took pleasure in doing it! Who am I that I should drive comfortably about while Clare is suffering with nerves, probably on my account? Then there are times when I threaten to chuck it and go back to Philistia and the Fleshpots. But somehow I can’t square it with my conscience. There are plenty of clever chaps on the ‘Outside’ who can do far better work than I can, but here — there is no one. The people have grown accustomed to me . . . they rather like to have me round, and they depend on me. I don’t see how I could turn them over to some stranger who did not care . . . you see what I mean? Well,

good night. Your going to the house to sit with Clare takes a load off my mind, anyway. Excuse these trying confidences, won't you? I don't often unscrew the top from my heart, but you'll not deny there is a temptation when you feel the other fellow is going to understand. You will go at once? Right-o, and thanks. If any one can cheer her up, you are the man. She thinks the world of you. Good night!"

His cheerful whistle grew faint and died away before Kleath moved.

The complexities of a life he had thought would be simple dazed him; more, they filled him with a fierce resentment. He had no wish to touch the lives of other people; he had no wish that the lives of other people should touch him. He had thought of the Yukon as a place where every one was feverishly engrossed in his own business, where the threads of men's and women's lives would wind about their individual spools, smoothly, and in an orderly fashion. Instead, he had found a place where lives lay jumbled like a package of jack-straws; where people tried to wind their tangled threads on some other person's spool and he was drawn unwillingly but helplessly into the general snarl.

He was wound in some inexplicable manner with

Joe Duke whose animosity seemed always on the point of an eruption. He was enmeshed with Tess, in a sense, and, consequently, with Medford Delany — Delany, that shyster importation from the Middle West, with suave manners, a vampire disposition, a pale, interesting face lit with a pair of flint-blue eyes; Delany the gambler, whose hands a Cheiro might have told you resembled the feet of a fly in that they had suction pads at the tip of each long finger. Kleath was wound in a knotty tangle with Clare Meredith and the doctor, with Goldie Meadows and Barney McCool. Indeed, he felt that he was woven inextricably into the warp of the Yukon and there was no breaking away, for the cutting of a single thread only complicated matters. Some one was certain to catch it and tie it with the first loose string which came to hand, throwing the whole intricate mass of fibers into greater confusion than ever.

He prepared to go to the Merediths' home, with the same sensation a small boy would feel at preparing to take a punishment he did not deserve, and he stepped into Clare's presence in no very sympathetic mood.

"What you need is a collar buttoned at the back and a bundle of tracts," she complained, without ris-

ing from the couch upon which she was lying. Her tone was hardly flippant; it was more defiant, as though forestalling a sermon from him. "Well?"

He chose to ignore the challenge.

"That usually means from a woman, 'What gossip have you to tell me,' does it not? Let me see —" he appeared to search his mind for news — "Oh, of course, I was forgetting! You should have been at the bank this afternoon. Any one who felt that Dawson is growing prosy and just like other places, was obliged to change his mind. To be sure, currency has, for the most part, pushed the days when a poke of gold was the standard of exchange into a romantic past, but the Yukon is not lacking in picturesqueness to-day, when a man celebrates his betrothal by giving his fiancée her weight in gold."

Clare was but listlessly interested. In her eyes was a look which warned him that she perfectly understood his effort to divert her, and of her refusal to be diverted, notwithstanding which he continued, "It was quite a ceremony. Eddie Farnum nearly burst with a sense of his responsibility and even the manager was there. First Bill stamped in, looking in his huge coon-coat, from every individual hair of which there seemed to hang an icicle, like the very embodiment of winter. He was closely followed by

his minions dragging sacks of gold dust. Of course, Len Cavendish and another policeman formed a spectacular bodyguard and looked so imposing that Weatherby had their photos taken for to-morrow's paper. Last, but not least, 'Diamond Tooth' Lizzie appeared. A mighty whoop welcomed her, and Bill, proud almost to the point of hysteria, marched forward and drew her to the scales. I never shall forget her!" Kleath was doing his utmost to make the story dramatic—"I can see her now, throwing off her wraps and hesitating just a second as though half afraid that perhaps Bill could not make good his offer, thus placing her in a very foolish light before us all. Then, with a toss of her head and a laugh, she jumped right to the center of the platform and watched the weight bump, with a smile.

"'Fling on the dust,' shouted Bill, excitedly.

"They flung it. Fifty — one hundred — ten more — ten again — another ten, still another, and then two.

"'You're a sport, Bill;' said Lizzie. 'I dunno how much my heart is worth but I'll throw that in fer good measure!'

"And right before us all, she dragged his face down by his beard, and she kissed him. At dinner, he gave her the biggest diamond I ever saw. They

had it at the bank where it had been turned in by somebody who cared more for a sight of home than for a valuable monstrosity. They had dinner in the 'Hall.' At first it looked like a meal, but by the time I left it was more like a flood — a flood of champagne —"

"Christopher!" Clare broke in, "for the love of Heaven, stop that chatter! What do I care for their idiotic orgies? There is only one thing which interests me. I wonder whether you will pretend to be ignorant of it . . . will you?"

He saw that evasion was useless.

"Did you ever think you would be happier," he ventured, gently, "if you tried to broaden your interests?"

He had resolved that night as he walked to the house to let Clare understand without equivocation that a flirtation, even the mildest, held out no allurements to him. He had often wished she would realize that she was no more to him than the wife of his friend, the doctor; that were she the wife of no man, his regard for her would be no warmer. It seemed difficult to make her understand this; her attitude throughout the weeks of their acquaintance had been one of obvious encouragement, as though she suggested that he should release the strong emo-

tions she fancied he was holding in restraint. His attempts to disabuse her mind of this impression had been without success owing to that chivalry which was so much a part of him, that deep-lying belief that women are what they are because men have made them so; that chivalry which always deterred him from his purpose and impelled him to treat Clare with a gentleness and consideration she perversely misconstrued.

He stared into the huge fireplace, watching ragged red and blue and green flames leap against the blackened chimney and told himself that now he must be firm. He wondered just what he could say — just how to say it. He searched his mind for phrases, delicate phrases — effective without being brutal, priggish or pompously virtuous. Exactly as he had been unaware of appearing anything but a mediocrity to her on that first day of their meeting, so, this night, he was unaware of appearing like anything more than a diversion to the woman opposite him. The conquest of men was, he thought, Clare's most serious business in life, and he realized that the one most difficult to conquer would be the one upon whom her attention should concentrate. But he certainly had expected that, long before this, her interest in him would have died, or that her pride and self-

respect would have rescued her — and him! — from situations of this uncomfortable nature.

“I should think that you would find real happiness in trying to interest yourself in more than one thing at a time,” he repeated.

She looked at him in silence for a little, then suddenly slipped from the couch to the floor beside him.

“Christopher,” she said, “let us thrash the whole thing out to-night. Tell me, am I so utterly repulsive that you can’t be roused to the faintest interest in me?”

“You are one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen,” he told her, honestly.

“Well then,” she was gratified but frankly puzzled, “why do you not act sometimes as though you thought so?”

To her, admiration for anything meant a desire to possess it.

“I have never made any secret of my admiration for you — your husband will tell you that.”

“I don’t want you to tell it to him. I want you to tell it to me.” She smiled charmingly and looked very beautiful. Kleath was not responsive.

“Well,” he said, “I have told you.”

“Exactly as you would speak of a house, or a public building or some other inanimate thing!

However, I suppose your intensely disapproving attitude just now, is the result of my mad escapade last night. Well, scold, if you like — I had expected it."

"I should not dream of scolding you," returned Kleath. "There is no need, even, for me to tell you how unwise you were; you know that."

She made a gesture of exasperated despair.

"Another proof of your magnificent indifference to me! Otherwise you *would* scold; you would shiver with horror at the thought of the risk I ran in that odious ruffian's hands, you would realize how I hated becoming the object of that girl's generosity — her pity — perhaps, her contempt! You would understand how bitter a thing it is for me to know that she will discuss me with those other creatures, or, at best, that I am a sort of social dependent, hanging upon her silence."

"You do her another injustice," interrupted Kleath.

She talked on, unheeding, "You probably know that I went to the 'San Domingo' to see for myself how far your boasted indifference to women went. You refuse more invitations than most other men accept, and we respectable folk on this side of town are curious as to the reason. I want to know. Fur-

ther, I want you to understand why I talk to you like this . . . and perhaps, then, you will be a little more generous."

"I would scarcely call any other attitude of mine 'generosity,' " he said.

"Ah! You confess to a wholesome respect for that hoary monster, that childish bogey called 'Morality'?"

"Most people do, do they not?"

"And Frank — I suppose you have all sorts of notions in regard to Frank?"

"Certainly your husband deserves some consideration, I should say!"

"Then you disapprove of friendships with married women because of the consideration due their husbands? And I suppose you disapprove of friendships with unmarried women because they might be compromised! Christopher, I wish you would be honest with me. . . ." A sudden thought seemed to strike her for the first time, "Are *you* married?"

He clutched at a hope which was quickly dispelled.

"Would that make a difference?"

"Not a jot," she answered, vehemently. "Marriage is only an emotional accident. As a moral

institution it has outlived its usefulness. Any scientific man will tell you so. Frank would, himself."

She kneeled upright, her face close to his.

He did not seem to notice it. He was thinking . . . of Meredith, of Tess and her idea of morality and marriage. He was thinking of Delany and what he would have done. Then, he thought of Goldie Meadows and of another woman — on the "Outside."

Clare shook him impatiently. She hated him to be oblivious to her. It hurt her to know that he could feel her nearness, he could sit within easy reach of her, by bending his head he could touch her lips — and yet he could forget her.

"What are you thinking?" she demanded.

"I think," he said slowly, "that you are not playing the game."

"Morals still? 'The Morals of Christopher Kleath'!" she taunted, bitterly. "Did it ever occur to you that morality can be carried too far? That the prude, to whom the pressure of a woman's hand is a suggestion, the touch of a woman's lips is a sin, is, after all, a loathsomely immoral creature? Certainly he is! For in his mind, back of these harmless exhibitions of affection or whatever you choose to call them, is a foul thought!"

"I confess to never having looked at the matter in that light," he answered.

"Besides," she went on, "are you made of machinery instead of flesh and blood? Can you say to yourself, 'This one shalt thou love, and that one shalt thou put away'? Do the various screws and levers answer the master-hand so obediently, whichever way he pulls?"

She talked on, passionately, often senselessly, her words rolling over him in great scorching waves. And when she realized that he was still untouched, she stopped abruptly, cast about for some last forlorn hope and, finding it not, burst into a storm of sobs.

He tried to make the best of an awkward situation, holding her without embracing her, comforting her without deluding her. As suddenly as she commenced to cry, she stopped.

"I suppose you have had enough of this," she said.

He did not deny it.

"Will you kiss me, before you go? I promise never to ask you again." She rose, arranging her clothes and her hair, trying to repair their disorder.

Kleath got up, too. He put his arms lightly

around her and bent his lips to hers. Desperately she clung to him.

She pushed him violently away. "I have had enough of *you!*" she cried. "The hills are full of stone. . . . Go home to your virtuous loneliness, to your gloomy morality, but remember, Christopher Kleath, what I say — some day you will kiss me of your own free will, and my lips under yours will be as cold and unresponsive as yours are now. Some day you will be obliged to hold your love in leash as you ask me to hold mine, and God pity you — if you really are a man. Now, go, you — you — Puritanical jellyfish!"

He closed the door upon the sound of wild, tearless sobbing, and walked into the yellow silence of the night.

At first, he was conscious only of relief, and then a feeling of disgust swept over him. He thought of a thousand things he might have said, he might even have pleaded for Meredith. He felt dishonored for having allowed Clare to place herself in so degraded a position. He imagined her humiliation at the moment, and suffered for her. That was his way; not to exult over his power to do right, but to regret the weaker person's desire to do wrong.

He walked, unheeding his direction, until the

sound of voices roused him from his walking nightmare.

"But I love you so," insisted a man's voice, muffled slightly by the impenetrable fog. "That ought to count for something."

"It only adds to my misery," the trembling answer reached him, as he stepped a little off the sidewalk that the two might pass.

"But I can't live without you, Tess. I have tried. I can't watch you kill yourself for that — that — for Delany," he choked over the words. "Don't you understand, Darling, that I want you to marry me?"

There was silence for an instant, then Kleath caught the words,

"You forget, Leonard, that as I see it — I am already married."

"Then feel divorced —" Cavendish used Kleath's own argument. "It is useless to try to convince yourself that you are doing right, and as for me . . . I simply can bear no more of this sort of torture. I shall do something to him, Tess; I feel I shall. God knows you have expiated any wrong you think you —" his voice trailed away in the drifts of fog and then there was silence.

Kleath commenced to walk again. One easily acquired the habit of moving briskly when out-of-

doors. But his mind moved slowly, as though it stumbled in the tangle of threads wound about it. Tangles, nothing but tangles! How infernally twisted everything was!

Look at Clare, something urged him, although he did not want to look. She enjoyed position and the respect of the community. She was quite willing to slip casually out of her marital splints and bandages, in order to break her bones in another accident! There was a "respectable" woman for you! Society smiled upon her; Society advised its daughters to pattern themselves after her; Society encouraged its sons to frequent her home, without stopping to consider, in its purblind ignorance, that they were likely to be subjected to scenes such as that in which Kleath had unwillingly taken part.

And look at Tess, something urged him, although a lump rose in his throat as he looked. She sacrificed her life to her idea of repentance, yet upon her Society turned outraged eyes. Over her it prayed in comfortable churches filled with its "respectable" folk. Listen to them repeat the Litany and the Ten Commandments regularly — just as Tim Meadows shaved, once a week! Watch them forget their vows and promises during the remaining six days!

Society whispered to its daughters of Tess and

recommended, by meetings and movements and the ballot, a wholesale removal of her and her kind from the face of the globe. And Society warned its sons, by appalling figures and charts and statistics collected by the medical and the moral professions, against her and her sisters of the dim street corner and the overlighted dance hall. Society sent its sons to the homes of respectable women like Clare Meredith who considered marriage an emotional accident and an institution which had outlived its usefulness!

What, he asked himself, was he, Christopher Kleath, to do about it?

A blur of voices again roused him to a sense of his surroundings. He recognized Delany's impatient tone and the unmistakable utterance of a man befogged by drink.

"If you can't get home any faster than this," the former was saying, "I am going to leave you here in the street. I am cold and the weather is not growing any warmer. Hurry, man, can't you?"

"Cert'ly," assented Duke, with more politeness than he ever displayed when he was sober. "Only keep'g pacsh wish you. Mustsh 'ell li'l plan — heapsh money — no risksh. . . . Needsh 'ome money, eh, Old Socksh?"

"Damn badly," answered Delany, evidently

dragging his companion along. "Come on, will you? Or must I leave you here to freeze?"

"'F y' leave me, y' won't hear all 'bout thish li'l plan. I c'd let y' in on't . . . square y'rself withsh Tim, plenty mazooma besidessh . . . shay, y' like Kleath?" he spoke the name with difficulty.

Delany must have flung off the body sagging against him, for there was the sound of a fall and of violent cursing from the foreman.

"What has Kleath to do with making money?" growled Delany. "I can't drag you any further. I am tired and I want to get to bed. My arm is as paralyzed as you are. You will be all right, though. Providence will look after you and keep you warm . . ."

His voice became a part of the yellow curtain which hung all about.

"Tell y' all 'bout Kl — Kl . . . th," promised Duke, talking to himself without realizing it. "Man with pasht, by G——. Told y' all I got card up m' sleeve — play it at right time. Shay! Where are y', Delany? Can't get m'shelf up. Legsh all gone shleep. Delany — Delany!"

Kleath stood motionless as though stunned by something in the man's words; something which set him shivering as the cold of the night had not done.

Was Duke's animosity, then, the result of something more definite than he acknowledged? "A man with a past," he told Delany. "A man through whom he could make plenty of money." How? Kleath wondered. Blackmail?

Putting aside the temptation to leave Duke unaided, he advanced a few halting steps toward the heap still muttering disjointedly and begging for assistance.

He had just touched the man with his foot when a whistle sounded in the distance. It was the doctor on his way home. Kleath straightened, hesitated, and became once more a part of the saffron mist. He did not care to meet the doctor just then, to be questioned as to Clare and her nerves; so he resolved to wait until Meredith had passed before taking Duke to the shack which he called home. But the doctor stumbled over him, and to Kleath there drifted a jumbled dialogue . . .

"Know Kleath? Of course I do. Finest fellow—" . . . "Withst pasht, by G—— . . ."
"In the Yukon. There, Old Man, steady, or you will pull me off the walk. Lord, why can't you leave the stuff alone?" . . . "Knew h'm in-a-minute . . . known h'm for-years!" . . . "Known whom? Kleath? Nonsense, Duke, you said yourself you

had never seen him before. Look out, man! Get yourself together! You are heavy! Hold on, let me get on the other side. Now, *walk!*" . . .
"Knew 'm in-a-minute . . . name got me firstsh-t'ing . . . Chr'sht'ph'r Kl-sh — Kl-sh-sh. . . ."



CHAPTER VII

As though endeavoring to counterbalance the ill-advised confidences which bordered so closely upon a betrayal of his dark and mysterious secret, Duke relapsed into a state of taciturnity from which even Meadows's bad whiskey failed to arouse him.

Toward the boys in the plant his manner was one of blasphemous fault-finding or sullen indifference, but toward Kleath he managed to preserve an attitude of studied politeness. In the "Hall" he claimed much of Goldie's time, save on the nights when Kleath happened to be there, and then he seemed to say more plainly than with words, "Ah, here is *Mister Kleath!* I must fade into the background!"

Whether or not he had confided further in Delany, Kleath had no means of ascertaining, had he wished. They met on equal footing only at the "Hall," and even there Duke was patently "the foreman," and Delany, the "assistant editor," except at the gaming tables.

Clare Meredith, too, showed toward Kleath a

studied politeness, which would have stung a less consistent man, for her chilling formality seemed to imply some flagrant oversight on his part, which she was doing her best to condone.

Delany, spending most of his leisure at her home, was not deceived by this subterfuge.

Had it not been for Weatherby and the knowledge that he was indispensable in the plant, Kleath would have left the Yukon — not as a man runs from a fight, but as one who discovers the battleground unfit for honorable warfare. He had expected a struggle wherever he might go, and was prepared to fight in the open; but for treachery and a woman's snares he had not equipped himself.

The long, dark winter passed deliberately, heavily, as though loath to go, and the days, which had been but echoes of the nights, gradually lightened. The atmosphere cleared of the fog which had spread its depression for so long over Dawson, and people stared at the detail of some familiar building as though seeing it for the first time. "Why, look at the roof of 'Doc's' house!" cried a passerby. "I thought it was painted red!"

The night Kleath stepped from the hotel and saw the lights on the "Hill" winking gaily at him for the first time in weeks, he stood spellbound, drinking

in the wonder of the picture in a soul-thirsty way, as though he had never seen lights from houses stream out into the night before. And the next thing he knew, he was crossing the little bridge which separated "Respectable" Dawson from the "San Domingo."

"You can see the lights on the 'Hill,' " he said to Goldie, without more formal greeting, "and there is no trace of fog. Somehow the air smells different. And the stars! Why, the night is just thick with them — I kept kicking them out of my way as I came to tell you. Wouldn't you like to see? It is not really cold, you know."

She responded instantly to his mood of joyousness.

"Just wait till I tell Dad. We will walk a bit, and then go to the cabin for some coffee and doughnuts. I made some to-day."

She ran off, and Kleath, catching sight of Barney McCool, crossed the room to the little Irishman who bent over a stove and shivered.

"Arrah, Chris, me darlint!" wheezed Barney, looking grayer, more deeply lined and more like an ape than ever, "is it yoursilf, the noight? Shure an' Oi haven't seen you fer a century, an' yer handsome face warms me more than all the wood in the Yukon! There's something the matther with the

stoves — have ye noticed? They're niver loike they used to be — they ate yer fuel and they look red hot, but nary a bit av h'at do they throw out to a shivering man." He broke off in a fit of coughing which forced the blood into his colorless face, in big purple welts. When it ebbed out, he looked ghastly.

"Graveyard," he gasped, tapping his chest and grinning. "Wunce Oi heard a cough loike that — only not so bad. It was our old hoorse, Kathleen. She took it in the spring, and begorra, in the simmer we buried her."

"The following summer?" asked Kleath, suspiciously.

"Well, not to say the following summer, immediately," admitted the other, reproachfully. "It was about tin years later that the old lady died."

"What about your liniment?" Kleath demanded. "You remember how it cured me."

"Shure Oi do. Didn't it do iverything except reduce the swelling and remove the glass from yer face? It would cure annything that had a mite av reason in it, but this sea-lion, grand opery Oi'm givin' ye gratis hasn't a mite av reason in it! Goldie says she will undertake to cure me — bless her little white soul — if Oi stay in bed with a poultice on me.

But begorra, Chris, it's lonely in me shack the whoile, with nothing to kape me company but a poultice. Shure, an' who would Oi be talkin' to, the day?"

Kleath laughed.

"A stickler, by Jove! Still, if Goldie really thinks you ought to go to bed with a poultice — why, there's nothing for it but to go. That's sure and certain." He leaned over the shrunken figure and slipped a bill into a clammy hand. "You might have a couple of drinks on me, as long as I won't be here to have them for myself," he said, carelessly, "and if you would like to dance and keep warm that way, pick out a winner and make the other girls jealous. Here comes Goldie. We will have a consultation on your case. Good night!"

He slapped McCool's shoulder, very lightly. He did not even make him cough. The soft blow carried only affection with it, and it sank through the shoulder right into Barney's susceptible heart. But Kleath was already opening the door before he choked down his emotion sufficiently to speak a word of thanks, so he had to satisfy himself by calling as many saints as he could remember to bless the boy.

"Poor Barney," said Goldie. "I can't help worrying about him. I think he is much sicker than he says."

"Yes, that cough sounded like the genuine article. He has had it ever since the night we took Mrs. Wade home."

"And it seems to get worse."

"Do you think it is serious?"

Kleath, like many men of strong physique and robust health, was apt either to deprecate illness or to be alarmed unnecessarily by it. There were no half measures.

"If you mean fatal," answered Goldie, "I should say not. People often cough horribly all through the winter, and they get over it. But I do think Barney ought to go to bed and take care of himself."

"He is afraid of your poultice."

She turned toward him in the yellow light from a street lamp and he could see her smile.

"The tattle-tale baby! Just the same, he ought to be in bed and have a compress on his chest whether he likes it or not. You ought to recommend that treatment."

Something resembling coquetry crept into her manner. It was thoroughly charming. Kleath wanted to keep it alive.

"He can't talk to a compress, you see."

"You did," Goldie reminded him. "I say, Chris — shall we try to make him go to bed for a

week and take turns at nursing? I will start in the morning when you go to the plant, and stay until you come home in the evening. You can stay all night. Of course you will have the hardest work, but I am sure that Lizzie and Bill would help."

A capital idea! He became intensely earnest about Barney's recovery, suggesting that they start in the following day to wreak their deadly vengeance on him. They would be very strict with him, they must be very strict, themselves, working according to the same method of treatment — to be chosen, of course, by Goldie, who understood nursing so much better than Kleath.

"I will rush to the cabin as soon as I can leave the plant, and you will be sure to wait until I come, won't you?" he asked. "You will have to show me what ought to be done while I am on duty, and perhaps you could make us both a cup of tea. . . . Wouldn't that be jolly?"

He had ever so many plans for Barney's comfort but most of them necessitated Goldie's presence in the cabin while he was there.

They walked close together, her hand tucked under his arm, and he wondered that he had ever felt the Yukon cold. The night was frosty but gloriously clear, and the stars, seeming near enough

to touch, sparkled brightly. Occasionally, a dog howled, but the sound was not a dismal one.

They threaded their way among the cabins on the "Hill" and back to the level with the river which lay wrinkled in the feeble light like the face of an old, old woman. Across the ice, thin patches of dirty snow were scattered, and here and there a rag or a bit of refuse from the town showed like an ugly blotch upon a coarsened skin.

Underneath, far underneath the water ran — blood in the veins of a paralyzed country; water which would presently rise and surge and rush and foam, hurling viciously in its powerful grasp the great blocks of ice which had imprisoned it, and spewing them out into the sea.

"Listen," whispered Goldie. "Do you hear the ice break? Don't you fancy it straining, clinging to the shores in an effort not to give way? There — did you feel that? — I can almost feel the thundering of the river."

Standing there in the clear, cold Alaskan night something warm and quivering touched their hearts; they echoed the faint tremor which shook the womb of Nature as she prepared herself for the great deliverance of spring.

"I don't know that I ever felt spring coming so

definitely, before," mused Kleath. "It has always just seemed to slide in, but here it takes a jump! Peculiar, that sensation, isn't it?"

Goldie nodded, without speaking. Perhaps in her own heart she realized what that mysterious stirring meant. In any event, she must have been a little awed by it; and, when she looked at Kleath, there was a new sort of wisdom in her eyes.

They turned away from the river and walked toward Tim Meadows's cabin. For a little while they talked, then they fell into silence — not the crushing silence of married people but the expectant hush of Youth leaning well toward the Lips of Life and waiting for a wondrous whispered revelation.

Tim Meadows's cabin made no pretence to architectural supremacy over its neighbors. Built of rough spruce logs, squared on two sides and chinked with clay, it contained three rooms of comfortable size. Its furnishings were of the simplest. But its atmosphere was one of cheeriness and warmth due partly to an abundance of bright-colored cotton drapery.

Plaster was unknown in the Yukon, and the prevailing custom, amongst those who must have paper on their walls, was to hang white cotton against the laths as a foundation for the paper. But Goldie

inaugurated a fashion of her own; she lined her walls with figured cotton and the effect was particularly pleasing. They were like an echo of the tapestry-hung chambers of the past, a precursor of the chintz-decorated rooms of the present.

There had been two entrances to the cabin, a front and a back door—the latter now hermetically sealed. It might be said without exaggeration that Tim Meadows never looked at it unmoved by horror. It framed a picture as vivid, after the passing of three years, as on the night it had occurred.

In those days Goldie had not been permitted to come to the "Hall." The solitude of her long evenings was supposed to be relieved by Mitchka, who was generously paid for her company. But as often as not the old Indian could not tear herself away from her own hearthstone to venture into the bitter cold night, and then Meadows had either to stay with his little girl or leave her to look after herself. He usually chose the latter course, regretfully, it is true, but not fearfully. Children of the mining camps are inured to hardships which would kill their civilized cousins, and loneliness is the least of them. After Goldie had passed the age when she was in danger of setting fire to herself, or freezing to death from carelessness, when she safely escaped kidnap-

ping which was one of her father's nightmares, he went about his business with a comfortable security, forgetting that her budding womanhood held out greater dangers than kidnapping, or death by fire or cold. He regarded her as a capable child rather than a very beautiful young woman.

He remembered feeling, on a particular night, keener regret than usual at leaving her alone in the cabin, while he went off to the intense liveliness of the "Hall." He remembered feeling very unhappy — uneasy, perhaps is a better word — for no apparent reason, once he got there. Goldie's image stayed beside him, her eyes looked at him wistfully, her voice called to him. Everything went wrong. The sound of quarrelling maddened him, the sight of spurting blood sickened him. For once he did not try to arbitrate or still the troubled waters. He fought with the rest, striking hard at innocent and guilty alike, trampling on the squeezed-in feet of drunken women, cracking together the heads of staggering men until they screamed with pain. He was berserk in his fury, his hatred of them all. He wanted to go home to Goldie, and home he went after the police had closed his doors — with a gash in his face which prevented the weekly ceremony of shaving for an astonishing number of Saturdays.

He remembered how cold it was, how his hand ached as he held it to his cheek to stanch the flowing blood. He remembered how his handkerchief froze and how choking was the fog. It was like a cloth about his face; it was like eating masses of dry potato.

A muffled noise reached him through the yellow murk. Was the dance hall rabble still crazed with a lust to kill? Well, to H—— with them, thought Meadows. Let them kill one another like the Kilkenny cats, and the sooner, the better. Then he would be free to stay at home with Goldie — he would take her far away from Dawson.

He stopped abruptly, turned his head this way and that in an effort to locate the sound which drifted confusedly about him once more. He could not see five paces ahead of him, he could not tell whether the cry came from behind fast-shut windows and bolted doors, or whether some unfortunate called for help, upon the street. Uncertain, he stumbled closer to his home.

Suddenly, he jerked his head up like one who has received a blow. He started to run, racing blindly and propelling himself along with great sweeps of his arms as though to push back the mist which clung to him, retarding his progress. Off the slippery

sidewalk he leaped, around the corner of a cabin toward a blotch of apricot light which struggled but a short distance into the paler yellow of the fog.

In the fraction of a second that he halted, a picture was branded on Meadows's mind which even the finger of Time can never obliterate. Every detail made in that instant its indelible mark. Through the open doorway, Tim Meadows saw the disorder of his kitchen in which a meal had evidently been hastily prepared. He saw the vague haze of smoke, he was conscious of the odor of bacon. An overturned chair lay between the table and the door, a girl's slipper near a pile of filthy clothing. Beside the table, one bare foot twisted round the leg of it, stood Goldie, struggling in the arms of a very drunken man.

Over her night clothes she had thrown an Indian blanket-robe, but her hair was unbound, falling in great golden ropes almost to her knees. She had obviously been roused from sleep to answer the insistent clamor of one who begged for shelter from the cold, and in her hospitable ignorance she had admitted this drunken brute. She had fed him, she had shown him a bunk in Tim's own room where he might sleep.

With a scream of indescribable fury Meadows fell

upon him. He thrust his hands between a bare, hairy chest and Goldie's ashen face. A short man, he seemed to tower above the stranger, as his fingers sank into a bristle-covered throat. How soft the flesh felt between the cords which slipped about under his hands as he squeezed! What peculiar heavings and swellings and guttural noises came from that thick neck! It was like choking a mastiff. It was astonishingly easy to throttle a man!

The two crashed to the floor, Meadows on top, his stumpy fingers still buried in the mass of flesh which wrinkled and showed purple under the coarse hair which covered it. The hands, which strove to tear his away, scrabbled feebly now; a dark cavern with red edges and dots of white yawned near Meadows's eyes, but he hardly saw it distinctly. It was the man's open mouth.

With demoniacal fury he lifted the almost inert head and beat it against the floor. It rolled loosely and made a hollow noise. This pleased Meadows mightily and he yelled his pleasure.

"You would, would you?" he screamed. "Well, that's for you — and take this one! How do you like it, you ——"

And all the while this was going on, a frightened voice sobbed like a piteous refrain,

"Oh, Dad — don't. *Please* don't. You'll kill him, if you don't watch out! Please — oh, please— Listen, Dad, listen to me — look at me — I'm all right — he didn't really hurt me. Oh, Father, for God's sake, *please* stop before you kill him! Dad, *don't!*"

He bent forward to lift the limp head once more, when something struck against his own head; the light went out. . . .

He seemed to be lying down, smothered by smoke so thick that it crushed him like a weight. He tried to reach out toward that knotty throat which must be somewhere near, but he was powerless to move. His breath was being slowly hammered from his body. He strained and heaved, he tried to shout. His mouth filled with smoke as thick as porridge and he choked. Then something incomprehensively strong clutched his feet and whirled him through clouds of flame-color, hot and cold in turn. A shadow loomed beyond and into that he crashed with frightful force. . . . He opened his eyes.

Goldie and "Doc" Meredith were with him. He lay still trying to recall certain sights and sounds which were enveloped in that density of smoke. A flash broke through and he remembered. He emitted a hoarse roar and tried to sit up.

"Easy, easy, man!" the doctor warned, while Goldie's gentle hands pinned him down as effectually as a cable might have done. "No more excitement this night, if you please. You have lost a lot of blood, but I regret to see that it was not your fighting blood. Never did I try to work with such a fellow! Now, lie still, Tim, do you hear?"

"'Doc' had to sew up your face, Dad," explained Goldie, laying her pale cheek against her father's bandaged head. "I helped him, didn't I, 'Doc'? And I had to try to keep you still when the dope was wearing off, but you *are* an awful fighter, Dad. Look!"

She rolled back the sleeve of her blanket-robe and disclosed a dark blue mark on her arm. Meadows groaned and smeared the place across his parched lips. "Darter," he breathed, in distress. "Me little gur-rull!"

Goldie smiled. "Oh, it's all right now," she said. "I only wanted to show you what you are likely to do to me, if you don't keep quiet."

"Shure, an' Oi must be quiet," he agreed. Then, immediately, he jerked himself up. "Where is he?"

"Safely out of the way," answered Meredith.

"Try not to talk, or you will open that slit on your face."

"Ivery toime Oi talk, Oi open a slit in me face," snorted Tim, giving a suspicious glance round the room. Then, satisfied that his home was cleared of the human debris which had cluttered it, he drank the pungent stuff Goldie held to his lips and presently fell asleep.

After that night he took her to the "Hall." He nailed up the back door so that she could not open it if she would, and in the front one he cut a little trap through which Goldie was commanded to identify each visitor before drawing the heavy bolts and chains. A rack of guns stood within easy reach, and dangling on the lintel was a holster containing a half-cocked revolver.

Naturally, Goldie had long since grown accustomed to the door which looked like part of some medieval prison, and to the rack more suitable to a corner in the barracks. But Kleath never saw them without being struck by their incongruity in the room which otherwise was redolent of domestic cheeriness.

Goldie would not let him come to the kitchen and help her make the coffee. This was unusual, as was

the silly shyness each of them felt and tried to hide from the other. Just as they had been silent before, now they talked, sometimes both together, very fast and about nothing. "My," they said at the same time, "I didn't know it was so late." Then they both laughed as though this were immensely funny.

They could not agree. Goldie thought the light seemed dim; Kleath said it was no dimmer than it ever was. He did not care for a very bright light, — it was trying. They discussed lights. Kleath fancied the room a little cold, and urged Goldie to put on an extra coat. She found the room too warm and took off the woolen sweater she was wearing. They discussed temperatures. Then finding that they were still standing, they laughed again and tried to think of something else to say. She did not look at him. He looked at her with a half frown as though trying to find an answer to some question which was puzzling him. Then they quarrelled about the making of the coffee and, finally, he gave in.

He sat alone still frowning and yet smiling. It was strange, that feeling of spring in the air. It seemed to lighten some of the things which had fretted him all winter and make them easier to bear. Duke's threats and innuendoes, the awkwardness of

meeting Clare, the burden of Tess's troubles — all these dispersed for the moment like the fog, and he was conscious of a pleasurable thrill as though waiting for something to happen. . . .

He remembered the same sort of thrill which always came to him on Christmas morning just before he was allowed to enter the room which held the lighted tree.

"Christopher!" Goldie's voice broke sharply in upon his reflections. "*Open the front door. Quick!*"

He was not the sort of man who must ask why, or who must run to see the reason for a request he could not understand. He rose immediately and obeyed.

As the chain fell clanking down and he swung back the heavy door, Goldie appeared on the threshold of the inner room, holding straight before her a blazing lamp. Behind the flames which leaped upward to the ceiling, her face was set, but calm. She looked with wide-open, intent eyes at the blot of darkness, walked near it and flung the lamp far into it. It fell on a patch of snow and the burning oil spread over it like a stream of flaming blood.

There was a loud explosion.

At this, Kleath, who had stood petrified, came

violently to life. He did not know whether Goldie was burned or burning, but prompted by impulses he had no time to question, he threw his coat around her and wrapped her in his arms. He did not know that the trembling of his knees made him lean upon, instead of supporting, her.

Then Meadows burst into the room.

"What's the matther?" he panted. "Oi saw the lamp explode. Is annybody hur-rt? Goldie, darlint . . ."

Kleath dropped into a chair. His face was colorless.

"Gosh, Chris," exclaimed his host, "is it yoursilf that's burnt, at all, at all?"

"No. It was Goldie . . . such nerve. I am rather squeamish. . . . She carried the blazing lamp — flames right to the ceiling . . ." he jerked out the story, and Tim's knees also grew flabby.

"Oh, Lord, Darter, is it crazy, ye are?" he demanded roughly, to hide the quiver of his voice. "Why, didn't ye call Kleath, here, or let the damned thing bur-r-n? Don't ye know you moight have caught yersilf on foire?" His voice rose to a ferocious yell.

"What Dawson needs is electric light," said Goldie, patting her father's cheek from which

copper-colored bristles gleamed. "Don't glare at one another, you and Chris . . . you funny men. I am all right. There was no danger. Just smoke your nice soothing pipes, and forget all about it. I won't be a minute."

She went back into the kitchen, wrapped some soda on her hand and presently returned to the shaken and silent men, carrying a plate heaped high with doughnuts, and a pot of steaming coffee.

CHAPTER VIII

Barney's week of invalidism stretched into three, during which Kleath had little time for retrospection. His type of mind was such, that he could deliberately set the stage of his memory for the scene he wished to rehearse, and in solitude and without distraction he then reflected upon the episode or circumstance upon which he intended to concentrate.

A peculiar and enviable faculty, developed through years of rigorous training, enabled him to put aside all extraneous matters and to give the whole of his attention to the immediate present. The intermittent recurrence of some unpleasant scene, as, for example, the one in Clare Meredith's home, would have had the same effect upon Kleath as the nagging of a child has upon a nervous mother. He never allowed himself to be harassed by the clamor of his thoughts; he simply locked them up to be taken out when he was at liberty to give them his attention.

This deliberation carried no suggestion of the

over-cautious man, who looks well before he leaps — and then goes forward on all fours. Just as he opened the door for Goldie, directly, without question and with adequate haste — the very antithesis of a frantic fumbling amongst the bolts and bars — so in all his actions and opinions he was clean-cut and concise. He had what in theatrical parlance is termed “directness of movement,” mental and physical; or, as Tim Meadows ably expressed it, he had a “reel git-to-the-point gait.”

This quality was an undeniable factor in gaining the confidence of his associates and in making him the sort of man to whom a stranger, confused in a city's tangled streets, would turn with the thought,

“I will ask that man. He will know.”

If he did not know, he was the last person in the world to pretend that he did, either to others or to himself.

Unable, therefore, to give his usual deliberate consideration to the puzzles and problems which beset him, he laid them aside until a more convenient season. He did not allow them to torment him, to float before him like a will-o'-the-wisp, leading him in one direction to-day and to-morrow in another. He gave himself up to the care of his patient and to the copying of Weatherby's editorials — rousing

appeals for the installation of an electric plant, a recommendation which met with his entire approval.

An emotion, however, which was like the dim fragrance of a memory, recurred to him now and again. It would not lie quiescent as did the case of Clare, of Tiny Tess, and Duke, with his disjointed threats and innuendoes. It centered around Goldie, and the night by the river and that blazing lamp. Several times the picture of her, calm behind the ragged cloud of flame, swept in between him and the printed words upon his rack. Once or twice the sound of that sharp explosion rose above the pounding, the monotonous grumble and rhythmic roar of the presses. Then Kleath sat perfectly still an instant, staring at nothing, his head bent a little to one side; and he wore that same frown of puzzlement, which seemed to have a good deal of trouble to crease the smooth flesh between his brows.

Once, when he looked up and felt Inglis's eyes upon him, he said more hastily than was his wont, "I was just wondering how Barney is getting on, to-day. He certainly had the devil of a night."

In the one-room shack at the foot of the "Hill," changes had taken place since the night Barney "entertained at cards." A good deal of scrubbing had been done, considerable washing of bedding and

apparel, places had been found for the muddle of articles which occupied the middle of the table or inconvenient spaces on the floor. Bacon had been separated from an old storm coat, bannock and a family of mice from that which bore but a faint resemblance to heavy underwear. The coffee and tobacco were rescued from an affectionate conjunction at the mouths of their overturned tins, and minor matters, such as labelling the dark bottles which contained coal oil, vinegar, syrup and whiskey, were given careful attention.

"Anny fool who can't tell the difference without a label," remarked Barney, witheringly, from the bed, "deserves to take the wrong wan! Trust a woman to find a lot of extra wur-ruk!"

To gain Tim Meadows's consent that Goldie might care for Barney McCool through his illness, had not been easy. Nursing Kleath from blindness back to sight had, he pointed out, been quite a different matter. Aside from the fact that he received his wound in the "San Domingo" under circumstances which made the proprietor feel partly responsible, aside from the fact that he was bound to be a prominent member in the community and that he had a comfortably large salary as befitted one who could be recognized as a gentleman by "anny wan wid half

an oye, an' it toight shut," Kleath was the pivotal point upon which the wheels of the *Yukon World* revolved, and his recovery was imperative in a large, municipal sense.

But Barney McCool was — "Well, what's the use in tryin' to put up anny argument?" Tim demanded. And he had the appearance of shutting a door in the face of it and precluding the possibility of any further conversation on the subject, by waving an eloquent hand.

But Lizzie, moistening her diamond tooth with the tip of her tongue, offered to chaperone and assist Goldie in her work of mercy. And Buck, affected by a new, large tenderness toward all mankind, promised to care for both of them, and Kleath, when asked, said he would vouch for Barney's consideration toward all those who might have a share in his recovery. So Tim Meadows gave in.

In her professional capacity Goldie regretted that Barney's acquaintances favored him with any more attention in sickness than in health. But she did not say so. It required more courage than "Doc" himself possessed to deprive the wasted little man of the joy he took in their unaccustomed civility. Sleep by day was out of the question. No matter how cautiously Goldie crept across the room to fore-



The events of the next few moments always remained a blur to Kleath. *See page 21*

stall a visitor and to refuse immediate admittance, Barney heard her.

"Is that some wan to see me?" he would ask, excitedly. "Av course ye can come in, Mrs. — bless the kind heart av ye! Shure, an' the angels in hiven couldn't be anny kinder to Saint Pather! An' did ye bring me that pot av jelly? Goldie, darlint, take notice. . . . Not an hour ago, Mrs. — brought me a loaf av her own bakin' and now here is Mrs. — with a pot av jelly to go with it! Shure, an' isn't the butther all Oi nade to complate me collation!"

Then, emotion drowning further speech, he would close his eyes from which tears slipped out, trailing down the deep furrows in his cheeks and making shapeless blue blots on the pillow.

He regaled each visitor with an account of those who had previously called, and, by the time Kleath reached the cabin, there was a lengthy chronicle at his tongue's end; so lengthy indeed, that it often lasted far into the night. Excitement then made sleep impossible, and Barney tossed and coughed the hours away, longing in utter exhaustion but feverish suspense to see what another day would bring forth.

One particularly bad night Kleath threatened to go for Meredith. None of the simple remedies left

by Goldie relieved the paroxysm of coughing or brought oblivion to the wildly roving mind. But Barney clung to him hysterically and implored him not to go.

"Shure an' Oi couldn't let ye go out in the cold, Chris. An' think av the heartlessness of gettin' dochter dear up in the middle av the noight. Look at me. Oi'll lie just as quiet as a corpse. . . . See?"

Kleath hesitated. Certainly the sick man seemed to accomplish miracles by trying.

"Oi didn't want to tell 'Doc' in the fur-rust place," confided Barney, "thinkin' he would put me to bed and say Oi was sick. But now Oi don't want him nosin' round, because he'll shurely give me something to make me well in a jiffy."

"Barney, you talk like a spoiled child," said the other.

"So Oi am, Christopher dear, fer the fur-rust toime in manny a year. Don't grudge me the pleasure av enjoying mesilf a little longer." He winked toward the shelf in the corner, "Be good enough to consider all that jelly!"

At the beginning of the third week, however, Meredith was brought.

He whistled a good deal, thumped Barney, "piped

his organ," as he expressed it, and looked at Goldie's paling cheeks. He inspected the ventilating arrangements and hinted at less company. Barney's eyes filled with tears.

"Shure an' ye'll bloight me fair young loife, if ye'll be takin' away all me fri'nds. We are just gettin' acquainted. They didn't roightly know me before, Dochter dear. But now there's hardly anny wan av 'em who doesn't belave me when Oi tell 'em tales. An' shure, it's no wunder — fer Oi'm tellin' 'em no lies!"

"Gratifying as that must be," laughed the doctor, "until your breathing sounds as though it came from a respectable pair of lungs instead of a jungle-full of angry rattlers, I forbid you to talk at all, lies or no lies. You may just look. We will allow the prettiest one of the visitors to come and sit for a little while, but if she speaks or you speak, I will put you in solitary confinement. Now who is it to be?"

Into Barney's heart a fierce desire sprang, a desire so daring that he could hardly whisper it. Doc Meredith had to bend quite close to his lips to hear, and Goldie, making a "poultice," could not even guess what it was.

"Why, I am sure she would," said Meredith,

heartily. "I will ask her when I go home. But no talking, mind. . . . Just at the door!"

When, inflated almost to bursting with his secret, Barney found an outlet imperative, he took Goldie into his confidence.

"Oi say," he whispered, "do ye know what Oi asked the dochter? Oi said the prettiest soight in the Yukon would be his lady standin' in me dureway, and he's promised to ask her to come to see me. She came to see Chris," he reminded her, jealously, "and Chris didn't have anny kind av an illness at all, at all. He didn't get half so manny presents as Oi do," he boasted.

He hinted at Clare's coming to each of his callers — scarcely fewer than before — for a day or two, then he began to announce it quite boldly, and was much annoyed when they raised their eyebrows and looked skeptical. He was reminded of the time when the Viceroy of India sent his wife daily to the hospital where he had enteric, to make solicitous inquiries. "'And how is Mister McCool?' she would say. 'Betther? That's good. Tell him that we can't have the Garden Party at Governmint House until he is able to be there!'" And now the dochter's lady. . . . 'Tell Mister McCool,' she sent a message by 'Doc,' to have three places laid at the table

to-morrow, as Oi intind to sthep in and have a bite av lunch with him.' Shure in India or in the Yukon it's all the same," he sighed happily. " Oi always was a divil with the ladies."

But Clare Meredith never came.

Duke was as solicitous as any one. He left the plant at an unheard-of hour in the afternoon and arranged somehow that a good deal of extra work should fall to Kleath's lot and prevent his leaving until annoyingly late. Upon the pretext of lightening his linotypist's labors, he generally insisted on taking Goldie home and he frequently called for her and brought her to the cabin in the morning. So Kleath saw her rather less than he anticipated; never alone. But he learned to know her very well through Barney. He could almost feel her presence. He saw countless evidences of her mother love, poaching a little on the preserves of tyranny but so tender withal, that illness, with her near, was made quite an enviable state. He began to wonder — without venom or jealousy — whether Barney appreciated her, whether he did not take her care of him too much for granted.

But Barney McCool, with his warm Irish heart, was more grateful than even Kleath knew. He developed a passion for trying to show his gratitude

by the disposal of his few earthly possessions and by the bequest of what could not be actually carried away. Goldie was the first to receive her reward.

"Me locket," he muttered one morning. "Take it off me neck."

She paid no heed, thinking he was talking to himself in the little gusts of forgetfulness he called sleep. But he was quite wide awake and insisted on having his wishes carried out.

Goldie unfastened a rarely beautiful old locket and laid it in his hand.

"Me mother's," he told her. "The most treasured thing Oi've got in the wur-ruld! She gave it to me when Oi was l'avin' home as a lad, and she asked me to wear it always, 'for,' she said, 'ye'll niver look at it,' said she, 'without remimberin' yer mother . . . an' how she sits at home an' thinks about ye an' longs fer ye! An' ye'll go out into manny lands,' she said, 'an' see loife high an' low. But ye'll niver be annything but a clean-hearted Oirishman, Barney,' said she, 'fer ye'll feel the love of me next yer heart day and noight. . . . And Barney,' said she, 'ye'll niver make av another woman that which you'd feel shame fer yer mother to be, so long as ye wear me locket and remimber what it manes . . .' She always had a great pity

in her angel heart fer all the soiled, strained people in the wur-ruld."

He blinked a moment and motioned Goldie to open it.

"She was just loike that, with her hair av chestnut silk and her oyes loike pansies under the dew, an' whin she spoke it was as if ye was hearin' the words av a song. Shure an' she niver knew fear. She'd walk roight into the middle av a foight an' talk a bit, an' the fur-rust thing ye know, the only discussion in the party was over the privilege of carryin' her bundles! Oi've seen her take the bottle away from a drunken man, and the whip away from a wife beater, with niver a command on her tongue. It was just her loving gentleness. . . . Manny's the toime Oi've been starvin' in the streets, an' had nary a copper to buy mesilf food. But do ye think Oi would trade me locket fer a meal? It's niver been off me neck since she put it on till now; an' it goes on yours, Goldie Meadows, to stay until ye have no more use fer jewelry, eh, darlint?"

"But Barney dear," protested the girl, "I couldn't take it! You will be going home some day and you will want to show it to her."

Barney drew his sleeve across his eyes, and swallowed once or twice. "Shure, an' don't ye think if

there's been anny chance av seein' her, Oi'd have gone home long ago? She died soon afther Oi went away. . . . Father Murphy said she pined fer a soight av me — that's how much me mother loved her boy. . . . 'Tell him,' she said, 'not to grieve because Oi've gone. Oi'll be nearer him manny's the day than sittin' here with the ocean between us. Tell him that Oi've nothing left in loife to do — now that Oi've given to the wur-ruld a man. . . . !'

Goldie did not speak. She pressed his hand in mute sympathy.

"Oi've known manny wimmen, mavourneen, but Oi've niver seen the loike av wan who was fit to wear me mother's locket, until now . . . an' that's no lie Oi'm tellin' ye."

A suitable gift for "Big Bill" Buck for a time puzzled him. There was little which the opulent owner of the Eureka Mine could not acquire for himself and Barney's possessions were for the most part heavily marked by the hand of Time. He had nothing new to distribute. But at last he decided upon a huge blackthorn stick which gave, to the usually goodnatured Buck, the appearance of a ferocious monster about to descend upon a defenseless world and club its inhabitants to death.

At the end of a very few days, nothing but his bare walls remained and Kleath was the only incumbent who had not been provided for.

"Don't think Oi'm worryin' me head about that bye," Barney confided, with relief, to Goldie. "It was the others that were givin' me slapeless noights. Oi don't moind tellin' ye, Goldie, that Oi've left Chris iverything else Oi've got, includin' me claim." He assumed an air of great cunning. "Shure, an' don't Oi know that nobody belaves me — except you an' Chris? An' do ye think Oi care? No more than a dog cares fer foive legs, dearie! Oi don't want a swarm av people stakin' all over the place — that's why Oi haven't even recorded it. They'd niver dream av lookin' up on the hillside, off the creek . . . an' that's where it lies. Soon as the ice breaks, Oi'm goin' up to take out the amount the Governmint requires an' then Oi'll make me record. Whist . . . even by rockin' it, the tails are as big as me two fists, an' Oi'll get more in half a day's wur-ruk out of me dur-r-t than plenty av these creek-bed smarties with their sluices an' expinsive paraphernalia get in a wake! Oi'll get the thing started an' Chris can finish it."

"But Barney," Goldie protested, "you must not

talk and think of leaving us. You are getting better, aren't you? What else do you suppose I have been taking care of you all these days for?"

He patted her hand, affectionately.

"Indade, ye are the wonderful nurse, Goldie Meadows! Puttin' loife into this husk av mine is no greater miracle than puttin' a new inside to an old cocoanut, or a fresh heart in an old bundle av lettuce. Givin' away me possessions is just a little way Oi have av amusin' meself. Oi do it iverywhere Oi go, or, begorra, Oi'd have to engage a train av freight cars to carry me belongin's! You should have seen me when Oi left Siam. . . . Didn't the Emperor send two elephants full ov prisents? In Stamboul it was the same. . . . Feelin' bettther? Bless yer heart, Oi'm so well to-day Oi could foight me weight in wild cats!"

He was better, certainly, but it is doubtful whether without unusual incentive he would have made effort to shake off his paralyzing weakness. Cavendish furnished the incentive.

"Where have I been for two days?" he echoed, in answer to Barney's complaint of neglect. "Man alive, I have been away in the hills, earning my large monthly screw! I have been out on the creeks rounding up an ingenious chap who smuggled whiskey

in a rubber arm and squeezed two or three fingers, as directed, for his patrons at an extortionate rate. He got wind of our coming and bolted; tracking him down in the hills was quite a little hunt!"

"Oh, Len," cried Tiny Tess who had come to the cabin with the young policeman, "was it dangerous?"

"For Walton — very," laughed Cavendish, forgetting to state just then that a bullet from the smuggler's revolver had singed the fur on his ear-lap. "But even villainy has its uses." He rose and assumed his best lecture-platform manner, "In this case it has paved the way for a legitimate and legally authorized sale of the *spirits fermenti* beginning from a fortnight this coming Saturday."

He sat down and applauded himself.

"A legitimate sale of — what are you driving at?" asked "Big Bill" Buck.

Cavendish rose again, chairman-like, and indicated an imaginary lecturer sitting beside him. "Mr. Cavendish will be pleased to answer any questions the audience care to ask," he said, graciously. . . . "In view of the fact, sir, that smuggling has become so prevalent throughout the creeks, and that the lives of the flower of English and Canadian aristocracy are being constantly menaced by these thrilling

man-hunts, our respected citizen, T. Meadows, Esquire, has definitely decided to open a Refreshment Pavillion — a Liquid Refreshment Pavillion — at Extravaganza two weeks from Saturday next."

He bowed several times and once more sought his chair.

"Gosh!" cried Buck. "That's a real business venture. Tim's got nerve all right! Why, it'll be like hell let loose!"

"I admit the probability of large doings," returned Cavendish, with dignity. "No dissenting voice? The ayes have it!" He grinned.

They were silent a moment while picture of the coming orgy unrolled before each imaginative eye. Then a small excited voice from the bed spoke.

"Ladies," said Barney, "Oi blush fer me restricted quarthers, but will ye have the goodness to sthep outside an' take the air? The prospect av an 'Opening' at Extravaganza with free dhrinks appeals to me! Chris, here, will help me into me clothes, an' then leanin' on the fair, rounded arm av 'ach av ye, in turn, Oi will make an effort to foind me best pair av sea legs! Sure an' it's Barney fer the barbecue!"

CHAPTER IX

Clare Meredith held within herself the dregs of such cheated hopes that the sight of happiness turned her literally sick with misery. Her husband's cheery whistling rasped her, the Jap's imperturbable smile made his presence near her a dread, the careless buoyancy of people whom she passed on the street had the effect of choking her and filling her very soul with nausea.

She was the type of woman who would have derived some satisfaction from seeing every one else bowed under a weight of anguish. She would have preferred sighs to whistling, tears to smiles, groans to laughter — from those about her. She sought no relief for herself, rather she looked for a means of infecting some one else. She did not precisely mope, she did not sulk; she actually suffered.

She believed at last — as a child believes its catechism, without understanding — that Kleath could admire her quite uncovetously.

She realized that it required no struggle on his part to avoid her, that it filled him with no pangs of

remorse to meet her, and that even her attitude of icy ceremoniousness did not affect him as she hoped it would. She pictured herself obsessed by an idea which had become a torment; living weeks, months, perhaps years without relief from it and decided that something had to be done. Whereas, previously she had striven in the pursuit of Kleath's happiness — shared largely by herself — now, she bent all her distorted thoughts upon the infliction of a wound so deep that it would leave on him a lifelong scar.

Should she endeavor to ruin him professionally, to accomplish his dismissal from every position he obtained until he cried to her for mercy? Should she try to reach him through that vulgar, insipid yellow-haired doll whose virtue he had defended with such ardor and loyalty? Or would he suffer more acutely through some action which would revert upon herself and for which he would feel responsible?

Upon whichever course she decided, Clare had little doubt of her ability to carry it through, for her faith in the influence of a beautiful woman over Man was fixed. She imagined editors and newspaper owners eager to do her bidding, the commissioner delighted at an excuse to close the dance halls and

expel their proprietors from the country. In particularly unreasonable moments, she saw herself a suicide.

She encouraged Delany's extravagant deference, although it was like the spreading of salt on a raw wound. It reminded her of the homage she had failed to command. Sometimes she fancied a mockery behind his overdone devotion; sometimes a pity. Either thought bit deep.

In vain Meredith tried to help her. If he guessed the cause of her unhappiness, he made no sign. But neither the gossip of the town — an account of Barney's illness and recovery, the sensational story of the smuggler and of Cavendish's capture, Tim Meadows's projected venture — nor a discussion of events on the "Outside," roused her to the slightest interest. The one night he closed his ears to the pleading of his patients in order to stay at home with Clare, she left him abruptly after dinner and went to bed.

She stood at her slightly frosted window one pale-gold afternoon and watched for Delany, who usually dropped in for tea. She would have been distinctly aggrieved had he not come, yet she looked forward to the next two hours with a sort of languid resignation.

Delany was no fool. He was by no means insensible to the abstraction of his hostess, nor was he ignorant of its cause. Up to a certain point, he had never been averse to sipping at the flower which opened its petals for other bees, so long as he could get the honey. His being was tinctured with a strong strain of laziness. The Merediths' home had provided him with a comfortable room in which to lounge, a well-provisioned table at which to eat and a beautiful woman to whom he could make love. For many months the pleasing conceit that he was to Clare the most acceptable man in Dawson had spared him hours of jealous frenzy, as he watched other bees buzz about her. Moreover, this soothing thought had the effect of levelling her slightly in his eyes. But with Kleath's coming, there was a change in him and in her. The fact that the petals remained obstinately closed over a great cup of honey provoked him; the evidence of her growing indifference to him stung him out of his amorous placidity, enhancing her value and investing her with attributes which goaded him toward a thorough conquest.

He ran up the steps, with an impatience which was not all simulated, and waved his hand toward the window. He could not see Clare standing behind the frosted pane, but Delany always took that sort

of a chance. And Clare, not knowing that she was quite invisible, bit her lips with annoyance that she should have been discovered in the act of watching for any man.

"Dearest Princess," Delany murmured, looking with a fine shade of meaning at her lips, then kissing her hands — the palms of them — "My minutes, to-day, have had leaden feet. I watched them crawl past like convicts dragging a ball which was too heavy to be pulled, and wondered whether I could ever get away! How beautiful you look! Isn't that a new gown?"

It was not. But a semblance of novelty had been effected by means of a lace fichu and a bunch of vivid silk flowers.

Delany never failed to comment upon a woman's clothes, a new mode of dressing her hair, a graceful pose she might consciously or unconsciously assume. It was an appreciation of such things as these, which first won the heart of little Tess, reared in an atmosphere which frowned upon beauty; it was an appreciation of such things as these, which still paliated his refined brutality toward her.

He poked energetically at the logs which were blazing admirably, gave a senseless flirt to the curtains, and conveyed the impression of a thoughtfully

domestic man who has an eye to the comfort of a woman. There was nothing in his manner to show that wild horses could not have dragged him out of bed to light the fire on a cold morning, or that he could no more have put his long, slim fingers into a pan of dish-water than he could have immersed them in a pot of molten lead.

He opened the door into the passage and beat his hands softly together as a signal for Oyada to bring tea, and he sat in silence until the Jap had made his final exit, as one who has infinitely tender disclosures to reveal. Clare was accustomed to these affectations and she could not determine on this particular afternoon wherein lay a difference, a difference which vaguely stirred her and caused her to fidget amongst the tea things.

"Orange roses," Delany murmured. "How like you to have added that unusual touch! I thought you could not look more beautiful than when wearing crimson. I find I was mistaken."

"That is what you always say, no matter what the color is. I believe you are running out of compliments." She gave him no opportunity to contradict this. "Tea sweet enough? Plenty of rum?"

"As perfect as the hand which poured it, thanks."

"Anything new in town?" This was her way of asking about Kleath.

"No." This was his way of avoiding the subject. Then — "By George, yes, there is! We have a genuine lord in our midst."

Her mind flew instantly to Kleath and the gossip about him which never had died out. She grew furiously red under Delany's keen scrutiny and felt that he guessed where her thoughts tended. "I was always stupid at riddles," she said. "Tell me."

He had guessed, and his tea, in spite of a table-spoonful of sugar, tasted bitter.

"I was in the 'Barracks,' this morning," he said, "and found Cavendish dividing his attention between a newspaper and the peeling of some potatoes. He looked rather queer and I asked, in my pleasingly flippant style, if he had inherited a fortune or anything like that. He handed me the paper and I read the account of a wedding — Lady Somebody marrying Lord Somebody, in the distinguished presence of almost everybody except the Queen! The bride wore lace and jewels which had descended to her from Cleopatra — everybody wore diadems and tiaras, and ropes of pearls, all that sort of thing, you know. Of course I sniffed a romance; I pictured little Leonard casting love glances at Miss

Lady Somebody over the laburnum hedges, I pictured a trysting place down by a sun-dial and stolen meetings. Then, I saw an irate Lord Father, surprising the innocent pair, and raising the sort of row an English irate Lord Father could raise. No wonder, thought I, that Leonard came out to Canada to the police force. No wonder he looked queer when reading an account of the fickle little Lady's wedding. The dear boy is too young to understand that Lady and Love and Laburnum and Leonard make a good combination only in novels. 'Friend of yours?' I asked as carelessly as I could. 'My sister,' he answered, and plopped a potato into the pot."

Clare showed signs of interest.

"His sister a Lady Something? Why, I didn't know that."

"No more did any of us. Comic folk, these English, aren't they? He said 'my sister' just as I might have said 'my cook.' You would have thought he would have told somebody, wouldn't you?"

"Naturally. I don't see that he gained much by allowing us to think he was — well, just a North-West Mounted Policeman. But how does that make him a lord — or was he one already?"

"No. He got word, yesterday, that his brother had been killed on the hunting field, and that makes him Lord Something or other. I never could keep these English titles straight. He will soon be an earl, I believe. His father is living and that is about all. When he shuffles off, little Leonard will be the whole works. They want him home immediately to look after the estate, whatever that may mean, and he is buying his discharge at once I understand."

"And leaving the Yukon, forever — the lucky devil," Clare remarked, bitterly.

"Do you think any one who leaves the Yukon forever a lucky devil?"

"Rather!"

Delany bent forward and seized one of her hands. "Then I am one," he said. "I am leaving the Yukon, forever — and quite soon."

"*You?*"

"The camel's back has been bending for some weeks," he spoke very rapidly, "but last night it broke. You will probably hear the story magnified and mangled, so I am going to give it to you, straight. Tim Meadows had me kicked out of the 'Hall,' last night."

"Medford!"

There was not so much sympathy in the tone as he could have wished.

"Only a matter of credit, Princess dear," he hurried on. "I confess to a certain negligence in the settling of my account, but heaven knows Tim has nothing to worry over — he has one coming or going — there is no escape. I had no idea he was going to make an issue of a few hundred dollars, or I would have given him my check for it and damned the inconvenience."

The reference to inconvenience threw into this magnificent boast an element of possibility. Clare knew nothing definite as to the extent of Delany's debts or his ability to pay.

"And why did you not offer him the check then and there?" she asked.

"As though begging to be reinstated in royal favor — crawling to a cursed saloon keeper — I? Not much! That was probably just what he hoped I would do. But I fooled him. I got up and walked out so quickly he didn't have time to draw his breath, and I will send him my check, like a gentleman — when it suits me."

Clare felt dazed. She could scarcely realize Delany's going. The thought of it seemed to take a

prop from under her. Perhaps, she told herself, she had depended on him more than she knew.

"Where are you going, and when?"

"The first question I cannot answer definitely, just now. It depends . . . but I leave here on Saturday."

"Day after to-morrow?"

"Yes." He laid her hand against his cheek.

"Clare, will you miss me?"

He asked the question haltingly, he almost stammered it, in a manner vastly different from his charming persiflage. Clare was startled at this glimpse of genuine feeling. It was as though she had discovered real fire and warmth in a stove which she had thought was only painted red.

"Oh, I daresay," she returned, with provocative indifference.

Delany thought of a man who had the power to make her forget him and a flame of jealousy scorched him. He did not want Clare to forget; indeed, he had come to the house determined upon a vastly different plan. . . .

"When I think of your awful loneliness in this place," he said, "I can hardly bring myself to go." He saw the shaft strike, and continued. "I may be

egotistical in thinking that I am the only person in Dawson who understands you, Clare. Just how much I have been able to alleviate your — your — er loneliness, I dare not say . . . not much, perhaps, for I have fancied many times lately, that I have even bored you. But at least you knew that I was near, that you had only to send for me if you needed me. There is some comfort, unconscious maybe, in that knowledge. . . . Don't think," he went on earnestly, "that it has been easy for me to be near you and realize that your thoughts were not with me. It has been torment, Clare, to watch the change which has come over you, to see you long for something that I could not give! And to know all the while, the utter valuelessness of that thing upon which you had set your heart —" he stopped.

"Medford!" she exclaimed. "Don't you think you are going too far?"

"Oh, let me speak, Clare, darling . . . let my love for you be my excuse! Believe me when I say that if Kleath or any other man cared for you as a man should care — as a *man* could not help but care — and I saw that you were happy with him, I could bear my own suffering in silence. But Kleath does not care. He has not the slightest understanding or appreciation of you. The friendship you have

given him is like — what shall I say — is like *pâté de fois gras* to a pig! It is God's truth I am telling you, Clare, I caught him in one of the boxes at the 'Hall' with a girl in his arms! That's the sort of man you — you offer friendship to! No wonder he doesn't want it. Wild horses could not have forced this from me, if he treated you with ordinary civility, but to see you eating your heart out for that hound — I can't bear it!"

"You need not excite yourself so, Medford," she said, coldly. "Mr. Kleath is nothing to me — I learned to hate him long ago."

He could not but believe it, judging by the venom in her words, although he shrewdly guessed that such hatred was but a sudden over-balancing of the scales of love. He followed up his advantage.

"He doesn't seem to think so. I could tell you things. . . . No, no. What am I saying? Don't let me stoop to that, but show him that you don't care, Clare! Leave him to his girls and the dance hall — leave the Yukon, forever! *Come away with me!*"

She sat perfectly still, staring at nothing. He could not read her thoughts for her face was as inscrutable as the Jap's might have been. But she did not protest, and the possibility of success thrilled

him and goaded him toward making a supreme effort.

"Come away with me," he urged. "We will go east to one of the big cities, to the things even a dog deserves in this life. We will forget this cursed hole, and I swear that the rest of my days shall be dedicated to making you happy, making you forget the misery you have known even in the best of times. You will never regret it, Clare. Say you will come!"

Delany got up from his chair and, hardly realizing what he did, pulled her roughly to her feet. It was an act prompted by the Devil himself, for it was the only one, possibly, which could have strongly influenced Clare. She felt his arms around her, she felt his lips on hers and she made no more effort to resist the brutality of his caress than she would have made to resist the force of a tidal wave. His kisses, his touch, would have been defiling to another woman, but Clare recognized in them the only love she knew, the love she had missed as Frank Meredith's wife, the love she craved. She did not respond to Delany's passion, but her passivity was a concession; that was her way — to take, not to give.

"Clare, oh, Clare . . ." he kept repeating, monotonously.

She drew away from him and sat down. Her practicality was disconcerting. "How will we live, may I ask? I am not fond of roughing it, as you know."

Rough it! He laughed. Her beautiful hands would never know work, her divine loveliness would be shielded from every desecrating breath. Ah, he knew how to take care of a woman — an angel! They would live just as she wished, and where. . . . "Meadows rather outdistanced himself in that beastly affair," he explained, with a good deal of excitement. "He thought he had me . . . he doesn't know, *no* one knows, that I have a tidy little fortune coming to me, and that I could have bought out his rotten old 'Hall' a dozen times over."

Luxuries, extravagances, rose before Clare's vision and beckoned her with an imperative finger. She lost herself in a dream of the future, of herself wondrously gowned and bejeweled, and courted by half the nobility of Europe. Then, all at once, an inharmonious thought jerked her back to the reality of the present.

"What of that girl?" she asked. "Suppose she should follow you?"

"Girl — what girl? Tim Meadows's daughter —" Delany, trying to catch the drift of her

thoughts, naturally turned to one which was allied in some way with Kleath. She shook her head, impatiently.

"Oh — you mean Tess? *Must* we go into that, Princess? I really wish you would not!"

"I have no wish to 'go into' anything. I merely want to know what is likely to become of her?"

Delany smoothed his pale hair all around before answering.

"I suppose she will do what they all do — she will attach herself to some one else. Of course she will miss me, but she will not follow me. I can promise you that."

Clare conjured up a picture of Olie Oleson. "Seems almost like throwing her to the wolves," she mused.

What nobility of character, he raved! What divine consideration to think of all these details at such a time! He could never appreciate her fully, but he thanked high heaven for the sensitiveness which *felt* the glorious goodness of her, a privilege which had been denied several other creatures he could mention. He would make provision for the silly child, who had attached herself to him with such persistence. And, by the way, what of Meredith?

"Frank will hardly realize I have gone," she said.

Clare's lip curled slightly.

"We never see one another, and he will have his black bag and his patients."

Thus they disposed of the husband.

She sat quite still staring into the big red fire, and listened, hypnotized, while he spoke of their glowing and luxurious future. No one denied him the gift of eloquence. She sat quite still and listened to the voices of Love and Hate, and as her hand clenched, she seemed to feel a weapon between her fingers, a sharp-edged weapon with which to strike. "Won't he be horrified?" she repeated to herself. "He will never get over this — never." Aloud, she asked, "What time on Saturday do we start?"

In the cabin which Tiny Tess called home, a somewhat similar scene was being enacted. This was one of the rare occasions which found Cavendish inside the house. He avoided the chair which was sacred to Delany's use; in fact he did not sit down at all, but leaned against the side of the rough, stone fireplace.

"And so," he said, folding the papers which contained an account of his sister's wedding and of his brother's death, "they think I ought to come home and try to fit into poor old Redleigh's shoes."

Tess shivered and stretched her hands out toward the blazing logs.

"Yes," she said presently, and with great emphasis, "of *course* you ought to go home."

"You don't really want me to go, Tess?"

"Indeed, I am *glad* to have you go!" She spoke her words in italics as though hoping to make them absolutely convincing. "It is *the* only thing for you to do . . . go back to the place you never should have left and the people among whom you belong."

"But," he argued, "I had to leave the place, and I don't want to belong to the people. I want to stay in Canada — not as a policeman, perhaps, but somewhere east. It is a topping country for a young man."

"Nevertheless," said the girl, "you ought to go home." She felt that if she said this often enough, she would begin to believe it. "You simply have no choice. You owe it to your country and to your family."

"That is your honest conviction, is it? That a chap has no right to live his own life, where he pleases, but must live an old one, handed down by some crotchety Johnny who died before the Conquest? You think that a fellow has no right to

break new ground and strike out for himself, but must stay in the same place, walk the same gardens, drive the same roads, stock the same parks, shoot the same moors, fish the same streams and be buried in the same cemetery as his father and grandfather and great-great and grand-grand? Traditions! Traditions! Rusty and worn out! Traditions sent me out here, because a younger son must live thus and so or get out where his poverty will not disgrace the family; traditions bring me back because that noble family must have a head — no matter who's head. All rot, I call it. I have a mind not to go."

"Oh, Len, but you *must*! You know you must! You will do what is right, I know."

"Will you help me to do what is right? Will you prove that you honestly believe I ought to go — by coming with me?"

"No, no!" She put her hand to her throat as though he had tried to choke her. "Don't put it that way."

He came to her chair and stood with folded arms looking down at her bowed head. "Your argument does not carry much weight," he said. "Most of those people who had such strong convictions martyred themselves to prove them. There was Savonarola and —"

"Leonard, please!"

He knelt beside her and took one of her cold hands in his. "Look here, Tess," he said, "I have made up my mind to marry you, and I will never leave here without you. That is as sure as Fate." He looked very young, and manly and determined. She could not keep her joy in him out of her eyes. He saw it and exulted. "You love me, don't you? And I love you, more than country and home and traditions or anything in the world. You are going to be my wife and together we will go home."

It was as though her heart were under a heavy press. She could hardly get her breath. "The very idea is grotesque, dear boy," she managed to say. "Fancy me the wife of a man who one day will be an earl! Imagine the horror of your family. . . . Yes, I must say these things and you must listen." Her voice failed but the will behind it was strong.

He argued and pled and threatened. He might as well have tried to move the pyramids. She shook her head and answered, simply, "You know how I feel — about marriage, dear boy. I couldn't do it. It wouldn't be right."

"Very well!" He was shaken with the desperation of defeat, "I shall chuck the whole thing and

stay on here. The estates can go to pot for all I care, and as for the family, why, it can find another head. I shall cable them to that effect, to-morrow."

She wrung her hands with the first helplessness she had shown. Many had been her hours of punishment, and bitter. But lumping them all together and doubling, trebling them, they could not equal the torture of this moment, to feel that she stood between him and his duty — his ultimate happiness; to realize that she had drawn him into the soiled tangle of her wretched life. She sought frantically for some convincing means by which to sway him; he must go home — alone. She felt a yearning toward him which was almost maternal. She would willingly have sacrificed herself for him, she would gladly have died for him, but she could not ruin his life by going with him.

"Oh, Leonard, please — please don't do that! Give me a little time to think about it. You — you would not want me to do anything I regretted, you know."

He promised to wait until Saturday, with a magnanimous humility, and felt ashamed of the temptation to press his advantage and force an acceptance from her, then. He told himself he was a brute to bully her but justified himself with the thought that

in no other way would she take the happiness which was hers by right. He had to thrust it on her.

He closed the door of the cabin and swung blithely down the street.

She stood in the center of the room twisting and untwisting her fingers. "I don't seem to have as much courage as I need," she whispered, in a frightened little way. "It ought not to be so hard to do right."

CHAPTER X

The road from Dawson to Extravaganza, on the Saturday of the "Opening," reminded "Old Timers" of bygone days. To be sure the clots of fur, which on closer inspection resolved themselves into motley groups of men and women headed for the Forks, travelled free from the burden of their household gods, "But fer all that," said Bill Buck, "you've got a purty good idea of the trail from White Horse to Dawson durin' the early days of the rush."

Now and then a conveyance of some description, or one which defied description, cut its rollicking way through the middle of the road. But the waves of humanity, rolling off on either side, surged immediately to the center again and obliterated the path through which the vehicle had driven, as a wave obliterates trails cut by children in the sand. Insinuating remarks and many snow balls were flung after these nabobs of the chariot, many of whom had paid Alphonse Leduc at the rate of one hundred dollars a mile for the privilege of driving to the creek.

Seats in the stage had been sold at auction, Curly Wainwright paying the top price — five hundred and eighty dollars — for one, to be occupied by Maria de Cordova and himself. By the time he reached the Forks, however, he would have given it away to any one offering to remove her buxom figure from his knees for a while.

It was Barney McCool who conceived the picturesque idea of travelling by dog team, and ridicule was superseded by admiration and a little envy as he careened gaily past the walkers.

Bundled almost beyond recognition, in every sort of covering he could gather together, he lay strapped on a cariole drawn by old Mitchka's six huskies. It has been said that a white man never accomplishes the successful driving of a dog team. Whether any such statement has ever been made regarding an Indian woman is neither here nor there, for old Mitchka herself trotted beside her passenger, cracking a long whip with a threatening *zwack!* and emitting hoarse, guttural sounds which sometimes became sufficiently intelligible to be translated into,

"Ay . . . ay . . . hai-a! Mush . . . mush on!"

A pale sun peeped timidly from behind the trees as though half afraid of this roistering mob which had violated the quiet of the hills. A child peeps

thus at strangers from behind the shelter of its mother's skirt. Clouds scurried across the sky with the air of abandoning the place to the mercy of an invader. Now and again, one sailing lower than the rest, would hang like a dark gray veil over the top of some tall pine, as though caught there and dragging at its fetters. The ground showed dark under a thin covering of snow. It had the appearance of a dirty body trying to disguise its uncleanness under a sprinkling of powder. Here and there, great naked crags poked themselves through both earth and snow, like the bones of some ugly ancient hag who could not find sufficient rags in Nature's cupboard with which to clothe herself. Nature, in fact, looked her worst just before the birth of spring.

Past the Forks and on up the Extravaganza trail the crowd jostled its merry way. A scant eighth of a mile, and then there appeared the enormous tent which, with a smaller one and a luxuriously large cabin, built and abandoned by an English syndicate, formed the nucleus of what was presently to be a hustling little mining town.

"Gee," more than one wag was heard to exclaim, "what do you know about the circus! Me for the big tent and three rings! Gimme ten cents worth of peanuts and start the steam pianner!"

By noon the big tent—the bar—was full. Counters on two sides, fifty feet in length, never cleared of elbows or of hands reaching out for glasses; and as hour succeeded hour and there was no diminution of the crowd, ten men replaced those who stood behind the counters. Ten more followed these, until they settled down into eight-hour shifts, working their hardest in an unsuccessful endeavor to slake the thirst of the Yukon. Professors of universities, lawyers, actors, bank managers turned bar-keep and no one denied that they earned their stipend. It was still picturesquely spoken of in the vernacular of old times as “an ounce a shift”—to which fifteen dollars was added the “sweeping” of the gold they cleverly spilled as they weighed the miners’ pokes.

“Takes me back to the early days,” said Buck, as he lifted Lizzie from Alphonse Leduc’s best dog cart. He managed to kiss her before her feet touched the ground and was rewarded by an indignant little squeal and a spirited tug at his frosty beard. “Yes, sir,” he continued, after commiserating with the horse, which, exhorted by a whip in the hands of one of Leduc’s hirelings, tottered off to Dawson for another fare, “that old tent looks right familiar. It’s the one Tim brought ‘In’ with him and set up in Dawson when we was still a mining

camp. Nuthin' but tents, then, and Tim's looked like a mother hen surrounded by her brood of chickens. Crowds all fightin' to get in just as they are doin' right now."

Lizzie looked at the lively scene with the interest she manifested toward any side of life.

"Say, I bet everybody in the Klondike's here, don't you, Bill?" She gave his arm a little shake. "Look, there's King McIntosh and his lady! And Mr. Sanderson an' his! This is a grand place fer a bank manager, ain't it? Gee, it tickles me to see all the swell bunch hangin' round the outskirts and gapin' fer all the world as if they was lookin' at a menagerie full of trained animals. What do you reckon they're waitin' to see pulled off — a couple of massacres or something like that? Say, Bill, I wonder if 'Doc's' haughty dame will be out to give us the once-over? If she ain't, it'll be the first time in history she's missed a chanct of trailin' Chris. Did you ever see anything like the way she tries to lasso him? If Chris wasn't the white kid he is and if 'Doc' wasn't a dandy little lump of gold, would there have been a row endin' with coffee and pistols? Well, ask me!"

"If she was squattin' on my claim," Bill made retort, "anybody who wanted her could have her."

A woman who's got an everlastin' case of grouch and who's about as affectionate as a snappin' turtle, would be every bit as much use to me as a sick headache. I'd stand that foolishness just thirteen minutes by the clock. . . . So you can remember that, my little missus."

Under cover of protection from the crowd, Bill's arm tightened round Lizzie with a sort of mammoth tenderness. She looked up at him with a charming display of dimple and diamond.

"Lord, Bill," her face was soft and sympathetic, "the trouble with you is, you don't know how tame you are. Ole Man, I've got you halter broke already, and if you want to know who's boss around this claim, just you start something. And as fer clocks—why I'm a regular wizard with their works—I could make thirteen minutes look like thirteen hundred years, if I had a mind."

"Try some of them experiments durin' the honeymoon, Liz. You can't make me mad."

They elbowed their way into the smaller tent, arranged for the pleasure of those to whom gambling wheels, cards, roulette and faro appealed.

"Humph," commented Lizzie, "looks like a mighty good stage settin' for a quiet game of rough-house! S'pose somebody'd start after the *chee-*

chaco. . . . Do you see how careless Ben Tisdale is with the winnin's of the house? "

At this moment the faro dealer looked up and saw her. He waved her a gay salute and continued to scoop the "*cheechaco*," or currency, as distinguishable from "dust," into a large butter tin. The occasional poke of gold which was added did not carry sufficient weight to pack the bills down, and, to prevent an overflow, Ben used his huge foot.

"Mind you don't stamp some of the figures off them bills," warned Lizzie. "Tim had oughta dug you a well."

"Make your play, gentlemen," called Ben, in his professional drone, then with a startling change of voice, "Come on and set in a while, you turtle-doves! I dare you to try to take some of this lucky filther away from me! Honest, I can't take care of any more of it . . . make your play, gentlemen, make your play."

Instead of decreasing his responsibilities, however, Buck and his fiancée added to them — added about seven hundred dollars. When wearied of this pastime, they rose from the table with the superb indifference of those who acquire money easily and want it only to throw away, Bill went into the bar, and Lizzie to the cabin, the second floor of which offered

crowded quarters for any of the women who chose to make use of them.

"Well, Goldilocks," she called, "you ain't a very sociable little body, are you? Sittin' over here all by your lonesome and readin' literatoor! Beats me to know what you can find in all that stuff. I read a book once. It had four hundred and sixty-five pages . . . but I was dead sick of it before I was half through. They're such silent things, aren't they? I like to hear people talk, don't you?"

She rather contradicted this statement by giving Goldie no opportunity and went on,

"We've been seein' the sights. I'm most blinded with 'em! Gee, the sussiety colyum'll be as long as my arm, on Monday! Everybody's here but the Queen and the Emperor of Chiny and the Pope and Bill Ogilvie. Honest, dearie, I bet there ain't three people left stranded on the 'Outside'!"

"Have you seen Tess?"

"No, by jinks, now that you mention it, I haven't. Have you?"

Goldie shook her head.

"Seems funny she ain't here," said the other, taking down her hair and trying to rearrange it before a tiny mirror which made her face look like

a half-filled balloon. "Gawd, ain't this mirror fierce? I can't even find the middle of my head, and this is the first time in all my life that I ever seen wrinkles in my eyeballs. I sure must be gettin' on!"

Goldie remarked that Tess had intended to come and hoped that she was not ill.

"Mebbe she'll come with Len. Have you seen him?"

Dutchie, coming into the room at this moment, announced that Cavendish had just arrived with two other policemen. "Why won't Delany bring her?"

"Don't think he's got quite enough nerve to show his face around here," answered Lizzie, emphatically. "Coventry!"

Dutchie whistled.

"He might bring her, though, rather than lose the chanct of gettin' her to work."

"It'd be more his style to make her come alone an' hoofin' it," commented Dutchie. "Was it tabs or cheatin'?"

"Both. Did you know, Goldie?"

Goldie nodded. "Dad said he just *couldn't* let it go on! He's let most of the tabs go all winter for Tess's sake, but no one wants a cheat in the 'Hall,' and Ben has caught him so many times." She went

to the small window and looked out. "I do hope she won't dream of walking," she said. "That would be the finish of her."

Lizzie blew energetically on the top of the frosted pane.

"Snowin' hard. Likely the last fall we'll have before the breakup. An' it ain't only snowin' but there's a right sharp breeze. . . . You know, for two cents, I'd make Bill drive me back to town and take a peep at that kid. I gotta hunch that something's wrong — feel all queer and creepy. . . . Do you reckon it'd do any good to find Len and see if he knows anything about her?"

"Well," answered Goldie," at least it can't do any harm."

By noon an eerie silence had begun to settle over Dawson. With the passing of a few hours, this unnatural quiet was emphasized by an absence of life upon the streets, so that one might easily have imagined the town withering under a sudden blight of desolation.

Since early morning Delany had busied himself about the cabin. He made no effort to conceal the nature of his work, but Tess, thankful to be undisturbed, lay still, with closed eyes, too utterly pros-

trated to open them and see what he was doing. At noon, however, she dragged herself from bed and set about preparing their mid-day meal. Not until after it was finished, did she discover what task had occupied him and the significance of it did not immediately strike her. She saw that he had collected as much of his clothing as a large bag would contain, and that he had packed it.

Her head felt very heavy and dull. Her body ached horribly. Thinking was impossible. If she thought about the circumstances at all, a vague idea occurred to her that he was going to spend Sunday at some of the cabins near Extravaganza.

She dressed slowly and painfully, standing until the room rocked and revolved about her, then sitting down until it steadied itself. She had not quite finished when Delany picked up the heavy bag and started for the door. "I am going," he said.

"To the Forks?" she asked.

He hesitated a second and answered, "No."

"But Medford —" He had opened the door and a blast of cold wind partly cleared her head for a moment, "Aren't you going to take me?"

"No."

"Well, how am I to go?"

"Suit yourself, my dear," he returned. "Or don't go at all. My interest in your movements ends now."

She staggered toward a chair and clung to it. In his voice she was conscious of exultation; in her eyes he might have seen terror, had he looked.

"You are going away," she whispered.

He laughed and closed the door.

She sat down in the empty room. She sat still a long time. Then she got into her outdoor clothes and walked down to Alphonse Leduc's. Could he get her out to Extravaganza? Well, but certainly if he could once lay his hands on the neck of that little devil, Pinkie Wade. What did she think, hein? He had already lost two customers because there wasn't one horse left in the stables! And why? Did she not know why? Well, *Mon Dieu*, he would tell her . . . because that Pinkie Wade, who was due at the stables at least one hour ago, had not appeared with his buggy, yet! Pinkie had been driving for him all morning — every one knew that the only sense that boy had was horse sense — yes, he had been driving all morning without a slip in his schedule, and now, *regard!* Mam'selle, herself, kept waiting! Name of a blue bag. . . . If she would wait? Well, if Pinkie came back in time, he

would send him out to overtake Mam'selle, and he would charge her but fifty dollars for the trip.

Tess did not wait. She hoped that before going any distance, Pinkie would overtake her, and Leduc was sure of it.

At the end of five minutes' walk, a sharp wind came from over the hills to meet her. It covered her with a veil of fine snow.

Delany laid his plans with a good deal of care. Having no intention of paying Leduc the sky-scraping figure he demanded for his teams, he sought for a means of securing a conveyance without the owner's knowledge. To this end he approached Mrs. Wade.

It was easy to convince this estimable person that he had played a very important part in effecting an entrance to her cabin on the night Pinkie had locked her out, for her wits, he knew, had been numbed by terror, cold and whiskey, and she remembered but vaguely what had been done and who had done it. He reminded her of an oft-iterated desire to express her gratitude toward him for the service he had rendered, and mentioned that the occasion was now at hand. And she, uncomfortably moved by his eloquence, agreed to do anything in reason which

would lift the weight of obligation from her shoulders. She also agreed to accept fifty dollars.

Waylaying Pinkie on his second return trip, the following afternoon, seemed to offer no complications. She could manage this quite easily, she thought, and turn the vehicle over to Mr. Delany, at any point he might name. He named one just beyond the bridge at the end of the street, waving the money temptingly before her and bade her good night. Clare, he decided, must send her bag by Oyada to "Old Lucy's" laundry as though it were an ordinary parcel of soiled clothing, and there she must wait until he could come for her. The laundry was situated, fortunately, on the town side of the bridge and lay directly in their path.

No hitch threw his plans out of kilter. Mrs. Wade stood patiently at the rendezvous. The horse, grateful for a moment's rest, sagged beside her. He parted reluctantly with Tess's earnings and drove to the bridge. There, he whistled shrilly and had the satisfaction of seeing Clare emerge from the laundry almost immediately. "Old Lucy" might have been included amongst the distinguished list of persons — the Queen, the Emperor of China, the Pope and the Commissioner — who were absent from the "Opening." She listened with relief to

Clare's apology for having sent the wrong parcel and handed the bag to her customer, remarking that it would suit her just as well to mangle them next week when she wouldn't be so busy. She went back to her tubs and neither saw nor heard Clare go out.

Delany met her in silence, too excited to do more than stammer. The words which surged about in his mind were like a jam of logs locked at the entrance to the chute.

Neither did she speak until he had tucked her in the buggy and turned the horse's head toward the Creek.

"Why, where are you going, Medford," she then asked. "That is not the way to get to White Horse, or to cross the border to the other side."

"Darling," he begged, "trust me! I am going to ask your entire confidence for a few hours, Clare. I am going to ask you to follow me blindly, without questioning. It is not every woman who would have sufficient courage. I swear that I will not abuse that trust . . . but I *must* see a man out here before leaving. . . . There seemed to be no other way. . . . You don't mind, Clare?"

He pressed close against her and she could feel his body tremble.

"Within an hour we will be back and on our way

out of this cursed country. . . . I have thought of nothing else, since Thursday. We will take a boat to Honolulu; they say it is the garden spot of the earth. Wherever we go will be Paradise to me . . ."

She smiled faintly and let him rave. She was conscious of no emotion whatever. Her preparations for leaving had been of the simplest; they had been tinged neither with anticipation nor regret. Meredith had left the house before she was up and had not returned. She avoided the method usual in cases such as hers, and pinned no message of farewell upon his pillow. She sent Oyada out with her bag, and had remembered to lock it. She ordered dinner. Before leaving the house she had not wandered from room to room taking a mute farewell of the various articles which had made for her a home. Her eye rested upon no particular object with fondness or sentiment. She did not wish for space in which to pack the little Taj Mahal. Nothing impressed her more vividly than a sense of irritation against the Jap, who had a cold in his head and kept up an incessant trumpeting and sneezing.

The sight of Delany, the sound of his voice, the realization that the step she contemplated was actually undertaken, awoke in her no pleasure, no

warmth. In a numb sort of way, she took everything for granted, just as she would have taken things to which she was accustomed, such as light, heat, perfume, soft raiment. She felt no keen elation at leaving Kleath, neither did she feel regret. There hummed in her inner consciousness only the refrain,

"Won't he be horrified? Won't he be horrified?"

The snow blew about them in thick clouds. Darkness had fallen and keeping to the road was a matter of the horse's instinct. Clare found herself none too warm, protected though she was by her own furs and by rugs of Leduc's providing. Perhaps she dozed. Then Delany's voice roused her.

"I think it would be better, dearest," he was saying, "for me to go the rest of the way alone. There is certain to be a fearfully rough crowd. I will drive you down the hill, a trifle off the road, and I will come back to you in the shortest possible time. Of course you could stay on the road, but you would be rather conspicuous and you might be subjected to some sort of unpleasantness. I think this is better, don't you?"

A fleeting recollection of the "San Domingo" and Olie Oleson prompted Clare to assent. She did

not know at all where she was. She did not particularly care. Certainly no sight nor sound argued close proximity with Extravaganza.

They rocked alarmingly down a steep incline toward the creek bed and Delany drew in the reins. "If you would like to get out and move about," he suggested, "you are perfectly safe here."

She shuddered at the thought. Nothing of a walker, hating the cold, refusing to wear properly-heavy clothes, Clare tried to circumvent the winters by spending most of her time indoors where, by burning cord upon cord of wood, she managed to obtain an almost tropical heat. She was what the sour-doughs called "soft."

"Well, I shall only be a few minutes, Most-Wonderful-Woman-in-all-the-World," Delany assured her once more. "I shall come dashing back to you on a dead run; I shall leap into our chariot and lose not another moment in putting miles between us and this frozen torment."

He turned the horse toward town and hitched it to a small bush. Then, getting back into the buggy, he took Clare in his arms and pressed warm trembling lips to her still, cold ones. The world swam round him in a rosy blur and he forgot the man he had to see before leaving Dawson.

"I can't be away from you," he muttered. "I can't ever let you go out of my arms . . . Clare, oh, Clare . . ."

But he suddenly tore himself away and rushed with violence into the darkness.

She sat very still and closed her eyes.

Delany gained the road and ran; passing the Forks, silent and deserted, he did not stop until a feeble yellow light and a confused babel of voices, warned him that he was close upon the end of his journey.

He struck a match and looked at his watch. It was just half past six. He smiled with satisfaction, arranged the peak of his cap and the collar of his coat a little differently, felt over his pockets and went forward somewhat more cautiously.

The sight which met his gaze, as he peeped through a small aperture in the big tent, was only what he had anticipated; a solid jam of hungry revellers clamoring for "hot dogs" and plates piled high with steaming pork and beans. There was no sign of life outside the tent, save when some man carrying a heavily-laden tray hurried to or from the cabin where women of a quieter disposition elected to eat their supper.

Delany moved on to the smaller tent, noting with exultation how quickly the drifting snow obliterated his footsteps. The night was ideal for his purpose.

He cut a slit in the canvas and looked through.

Barney McCool, Eddie Farnum, a young bookkeeper in the Alaska Trading Company, named Peters, and Ben Tisdale were the only persons inside. All except the latter were intent upon the revolutions of a gambling wheel. Ben, still endeavoring with one foot to cram several thousand dollars into his butter tin, was counting piles of *cheechaco* and wrapping it in bundles on the table before him.

"Oi win," shouted Barney. "That's three hundred fer me, Ben! Oi'll just have wan more go, an' then fer a bite av food. Shure, an' if Oi could see a flock av ham sandwiches flyin' over this tint, Oi'll be out with a gun shootin' 'em down so quick, they'd niver know what struck 'em. Oi could ate me best fri'nd to-noight, Oi'm that hungry."

He took a deep breath and stretched his hand out toward the wheel.

"Now watch, byes — watch and pray. Here goes!"

Ben turned to watch. It is possible that Barney prayed. At any rate no one saw a man enter, no one heard his step as he strode lightly over the soft

ground, bare save for a few balsam branches. He did not advance very far, but stood near the opening, turning slightly sidewise to it.

"Hands up, boys," he commanded, softly, "and make no noise!"

Four pairs of eyes were lifted in astonishment, and immediately four pairs of hands were flung into the air. Four men were covered with two shining revolvers, held as though they might mean business.

The man, muffled beyond recognition, spoke further. His voice was low, but distinct.

"Take your foot off that money, sweep the bundles from the table into the box and shove it to me, keeping one hand in the air. Be quick!"

Cursing, Ben stooped to obey. He was no coward nor were the others, but even the most courageous find it difficult, for the sake of a few hundred dollars, to invite Death at the point of a highwayman's revolver.

"Push!" ordered the man, sharply. "No nonsense! Push faster! Get that box where I can reach it, before I have to ask you again . . . and keep your other hand in the air!"

Ben pushed, and the men behind him looked on breathless, fascinated. Foot by foot he lessened the distance between the man and the money; six — five

— four — three — They could see a movement which preceded his stooping to lift the booty and make off; they even filled their lungs in preparation for the shout of alarm which would presently burst from their throats, when another figure appeared.

Swiftly, soundlessly he moved. Deliberately he walked in front of those two gleaming revolvers. There was a noise of *Smack! Smack!* as Christopher Kleath caught the wrists which held them and lifted them above his head.

There was no fight. Instantly, four other men came to his assistance. They disarmed the stranger and tore off the cap which had hidden his features. They stared.

“Delany — by the gods!” cried Tisdale. “Eddie, you run for Tim Meadows and the police!”

CHAPTER XI

Clare realized with a shiver that she was very cold. She had not exactly slept; she had simply withdrawn herself so completely from the present as to be entirely oblivious to her surroundings or the passage of time. She had lain very still under the rugs, closing her eyes and reviewing countless scenes in which she was always the central figure.

Some of the pictures which spread across the screen of her mind were imaginary; others were real. But she looked at them as a disinterested outsider. The elemental springs of her being were dried; indeed, a fantastic thought came to her and she began to imagine she was dead; that she had done forever with the shell of herself which used to think and feel, and that through the eyes of her spirit, separated now from her body, she saw these pictures of the past and present.

One emotion and one sensation touched her . . . neither love nor hate, remorse nor despair, sorrow nor joy. She was conscious only of fear and the cold.

The darkness and the silence, a threatening, comminative silence, made her quiver. She had always dreaded the dark; in her bedroom a night-light never failed to burn. She had always hated solitude. And this eerie quiet was made more terrifying by the blackness through which things that made no noise seemed to creep nearer and nearer. . . .

She could not imagine how long Delany's absence had lasted. He had spoken indefinitely of his errand as requiring a "short time." Whether that might mean fifteen minutes or an hour and a half, she had no idea.

A flicker of curiosity, which turned almost immediately to resentment, touched her. Why had he driven out to the Creek at all, as though any matter could vie in importance with their getting out of Dawson? He must have known that her position could not fail to be disagreeable, sitting on a dark and lonely road waiting for him! She supposed, a little contemptuously, that a matter of money was responsible for this trip and her resentment momentarily increased until it became almost a real sensation — of anger. Why, she asked herself, had he not made all those tiresome arrangements, the details of which she preferred to be spared, long ago, instead of waiting until the last moment and subject-

ing her to discomfort and danger? If this circumstance were indicative of his mental attitude toward the woman who was braving so much for his sake, she argued, at the very outset of their journey, what would be the appalling result?

She had never known inconsideration, to say nothing of danger, and novelty in this case was not flavored with the spice we usually associate with it.

These and other disquieting thoughts crowded into Clare's mind while she was emerging from semi-consciousness and becoming alive to her surroundings. Then all at once she was thoroughly alert. The horse, motionless until now, standing in a trance of fatigue, shook itself violently and whinnied. It took several steps forward, until, feeling the drag of a loosely-tied rein, it stopped and commenced to back. The wheels of the trap locked, and Clare was tipped alarmingly to one side. She jumped clear of the vehicle in a fury of fear.

Incapable at any time, she was helpless in an emergency. She did not know what to do for the horse, kicking and plunging in a frenzy of cold and hunger, even had she possessed sufficient courage to go near it. The idea of getting into the buggy and trusting herself to the animal's homing instinct occurred to her, but the possibility of being dashed

to pieces at the heels of a runaway, made her discard it. Besides, there was the incriminating evidence of those two traveling bags; she could not drive with them to Alphonse Leduc's stable. She *might* get the horse to the road and go to Extravaganza, but — no! Her pride revolted. What humiliation for her who had been so passionately sought, to go in search of the man who had forgotten her. And, anyway, he must have left the place long since.

That was it! He had left the tent and had missed her. How he ever expected to find her in the blinding snowstorm was a question she felt she should have asked. Hardly a dozen feet from the horse, she could not see it. Somehow, to picture Delany racked with anxiety, stumbling through the brush along the creek-bed, rushing hither and thither in an agony of terror for her sake, and uttering her name in a voice choked with desperation, soothed her. It served him right, she thought.

Walking some distance away from the noise of the horse's struggles, she stood very still, straining every faculty in an effort to catch some sound. Nothing but the fretful cry of the wind, the harsh crackling of bare branches, reached her. She faced one way, then another, confused as to direction and not know-

ing from which point he would presently burst through the white cloud and seize her in his arms. He would possibly sob brokenly in his relief. She thought a little more kindly of him.

But all the kind thoughts in the world could not prevent her from realizing that she was miserably cold. Standing at a safe distance from the horse, she tried to flatter it into a quieter mood, so as to approach near enough to take the rugs from the buggy and protect her feet, at least, from the snow. But as though enraged at this insult to its needs and desires, the animal reared in one mad plunge, snapped the rein and dashed insanely off into the enveloping night.

Clare stood transfixed. For a space she heard a diminishing *clup-clup . . . clup-clup . . . clup-clup . . .* then came the sound of splintering wood.

Then silence!

The horse was gone. She was miles from Dawson . . . now what would Delany do? This was the result of his inconsideration, of his lengthy conference. In the peculiar, twisted sort of way which was so characteristic of her, Clare felt a moment's exultation, as she anticipated the trouble this new development would give to Delany. She forgot its effect upon herself and considered it only in the light

of a judgment upon him for his selfish treatment of her. He would have serious difficulty, now, in getting her back to Dawson. . . .

Then she realized her own predicament. What should she do? Only a short time ago she could think but could not feel; now she could feel but could not think. What should she do?

Standing still or even walking about in a circumscribed area was out of the question. She was rapidly freezing to death. But she could not decide what to do . . . try to go home and send Medford away without her? Should she go back to a life which would be more unbearable than ever with Dawson's suspicion overshadowing her escapade this night? Should she go back to a tangle of lies — explanatory lies — as to those horrible traveling bags, or should she humble herself by going in search of him . . . by trying to find him at the tent?

No, no . . . she had forgotten! He was not at the tent . . . he was trying to find her. If she left the spot, she would assuredly pass him without knowing it . . . they would miss one another in the darkness and the snow. . . .

What should she do?

Get out of the cold at any price. Humiliation, suspicion, lies and more suspicion, were infinitely

easier to bear than this death-breathing cold! She must find shelter, somewhere!

With this determination, Clare gained the road where she found herself once more hopelessly bewildered. Which way should she turn to reach the Forks, where at the "Barracks," at least, she would find warmth and protection?

She commenced to walk. The pain in her feet was excruciating, and, with every step, she groaned. Her thin boots were wet in some places, frozen in others. Neither their thin soles nor the snow, as yet unpacked by travel, were sufficient to protect her from the sharp stones in the road. In her mind there arose a comparison between herself and one of the early Christian martyrs, condemned to walk on red hot pebbles.

After miles of staggering and stumbling, sometimes falling, her shoulders and back commenced to ache. The weight of her furs was more than she could carry; she must either discard them or sit down. She sank to the ground. "But I must not go to sleep," she told herself. "I must not go to sleep."

Finding it impossible to keep awake, she got up painfully and staggered on. Sometimes she screamed aloud in terror, as a phantom with an icy

breath passed close beside her. If she had desperately hoped to avoid people a little while ago, now she longed with equal desperation for some sort of human companionship . . . anything, any one, to stand between her and those mysterious white shapes which clutched at her from both sides of the road. Sometimes, she missed her footing and crashed into a tree. Sometimes, she called Delany's name in a sobbing quaver. But, for the most part, she was like a child afraid to cry out in the dark, so she dragged herself along in silence save for gasps and groans.

Hours and hours and hours passed . . . numb physically and mentally she walked, impelled by a force stronger than her consciousness, driven to the making of a superhuman effort to preserve her life. "I must not go to sleep," she repeated, without realizing it, "I certainly must not go to sleep."

She sank to her knees, positive that she could not go on. Then, she staggered to her feet, astonished at her power to do so. What muffled sound was that drifting through the clouds of swirling snow? She stood as still as her trembling limbs permitted and listened . . . irregular breathing and broken gasps coming from some one who seemed to be suffering extreme exhaustion.

"Medford," cried Clare. "Oh, is that you, Medford?"

A shape, white and blurred, loomed close beside her. A woman's voice answered,

"No, it is I. Medford has gone away. . . ."

Clare felt herself falling.

There was a blank.

"Get up! Get up!" She was dragged and wrenched in an agonizing way. "You must not sleep," said the voice. "You must come on."

"No," she answered, stupidly. "I know I must not sleep."

She was pulled forward a few steps at a time by a person very much smaller than herself. She leaned on this little body, heavily and with relief.

"Who are you?" she asked. "And where are we going?"

"My name is Tess," said the other, between heavy breaths, "and I am taking you to the Forks. You could never have walked to Dawson. I have just come from there, and oh, Mrs. Meredith, it is a long—long way." Her voice broke and she stumbled.

It did not occur to Clare to ask how she was recognized.

"Was I walking to *Dawson*? I thought I had turned the other way."

The companionship, the feeling that she was being looked after, and that there was no further need for responsibility on her part, cheered her. The terrifying shapes, which had clutched at her in the darkness, fled away; she imagined she felt warmer. But her limbs were stiff and would not move as she wished them. Her face seemed paralyzed so that her lips refused to frame anything but indistinct words, now when she was not afraid to speak. Her mind, too, was stiff. . . . She tried to catch at the tail of a thought. There was a fearful noise inside her head, as though it were full of shouting voices. They were merely the questions she wanted to ask, beating themselves against her numbed brain in an endeavor to register an impression there.

"Why did you walk?" she managed to say, although knowing why was of no especial interest to her.

Tess asked herself the question for the first time. "I don't know," she answered vaguely. "I don't know why I came at all. I might have stayed at home . . . it is very cold, isn't it?"

"I have been out here hours and hours," complained Clare. "This will kill me."

Tess fell. Clare stood by, her hands in her muff, while she got to her feet.

"I should have thought you would have driven," said the girl.

"I did. I drove with —" she stopped. What had Tess said? That Medford had gone? Impossible! He would not go alone. He had started out with her and if he had not intended to take her, why all this pretense? What had he to gain by it? No, of course, he had not gone. The girl did not know. . . . Presently she would surprise him in close parley with some man. His expression when he saw her with his creature. . . . Clare could imagine it. She winced.

He must not see them together. There was something humiliating in the very idea. She would find a way to rid herself of the girl as soon as they came near the tent. But some day she would tell Medford. Oh, she would not let him forget this night!

Tess crawled on. The shock of finding Clare, which had stimulated her for a moment, was rapidly wearing off, leaving her in a state of torpor which bordered upon coma. A haunting sense of responsibility drove her to the limit of her endurance, although she could not think what she was expected

to do. She just bent under the weight of Clare's body and stumbled on.

She was breaking under the stress of months of mental and physical agony; the unaccustomed demands made upon her strength in the "Hall," the gnawing bitterness of her remorse, the violence of her struggles with a giant called Temptation who fought side by side with Len Cavendish and to whom many a stronger woman would have yielded! She had left no weapons with which to fight fatigue and cold.

She had promised Cavendish an answer to-day. It must be one, she determined, which would convince him of his duty to country and to family, an answer which, in other words, would send him back to England, alone. Delany's going in no way affected her decision. It could not wipe the blot away from her soul. It could not alter the possibility that some day Len might turn from her in loathing, and that she might not be able to look into the eyes of his children for very shame of her wretched past. She was now, in truth, an abandoned woman!

She stopped and struggled for breath. She was conscious that Clare had been talking. She thought they must be very near the Forks. She did not realize how slowly through the snow which lay quite

deep upon the road she had moved with her heavy burden — She had not even reached the spot from which Clare had started on her pilgrimage back to Dawson, the spot where, had she but known it, a large fur rug lay upon the snow. A little farther on, in the creek-bed, two traveling bags had been flung from a wildly-rocking buggy. They were soon hidden under a light blanket of snow. Later, an impetuous torrent from the hills washed over them, and finally they were buried beneath a deposit of rocky soil and were lost forever to the sight of men.

“I think it must be very late,” gasped Tess. “I have a watch but can’t see it. Surely, some one will be passing homeward pretty soon.”

A horrible suspicion flashed into the muddle of Clare’s mind. They were not on the road at all! The girl, desperate at Delany’s going, had laid this trap for her. She was being led away from warmth and shelter; she was being deliberately frozen!

“Don’t b’lieve you’re tak’g me to Forks, ’t all,” she mumbled, scarcely able to move the muscles of her face. “Must be near — Daws’n. . . . Won’t go ’nother step — with y’!”

“We are not near Dawson,” contradicted Tess, panting. “Do you see-a-light-over-there?”

Clare peered through the snow, "No."

"It seems to have disappeared, now. Perhaps-some-one-is-driving-home." She felt as though she had slept hours between each word. "I think we *must* go on. Try! It takes a great deal of courage, doesn't it?" She struggled with her speech.

"I — won't go-step! Don't know — where — are," insisted Clare. "Sit — here — some one pass-es." She fell and did not rise.

Tess, released from the weight of her burden suddenly, stumbled forward, too, and lay on her face.

Clare did not think at all. The relief at sitting down was amazing. She leaned against a boulder, softened by some small scrub and felt almost comfortable. Her muff she managed to slide under her feet. Then, seeing Tess's beside her, she laid it on top of them. She mumbled incessantly, without having much idea of what she was trying to say.

"Driv'g — back — soon. My horse — ran — Come closer — keep warm — See light — hear some one-talk —"

Tess did not answer. She did not move. Clare's voice dropped lower and her words became quite unintelligible.

They ceased.

Neither of them heard voices nor knew that two men passed near enough to touch them.

"But I can't understand what form of insanity ever gave you an idea of getting away with it," said one. "A successful hold-up in Dawson is only attempted now by writers of fiction."

"The odds were with me," snarled the other. "I did not take such a very long chance. Everybody was in the big tent, eating. Only four men in the little one. Five seconds to get my hands on the money and then — off! The night, the snow covering my tracks — you never would have found my trail, and once across the border, I was safe. Everything would have worked," he complained, bitterly, "except for Kleath, damn him!"

"Everything always does work, except for something," argued Cavendish. "I don't see how you overlooked the possibility of some one entering the tent and giving the alarm."

"I didn't," Delany flung at him. "Until the minute my hands hovered over the tin box, I had half an eye on the flap. Besides, any one who came in would not have given an alarm. He would have been covered with the rest. How was I to know

that Kleath would risk having a shaft of daylight drilled through his cursed hide by walking right into the muzzles of my guns? ”

He stopped and peered through the veil of snow down toward the creek-bed.

“ I say, Cavendish,” he spoke rapidly, “ would you consider a proposition which holds advantages for both of us? ”

“ No,” said Cavendish, shortly, “ I hardly think I would. Walk on! ”

“ No, no! Wait just a minute, here. . . . It won't do you any harm to listen! I say, Len, it concerns Tess. Unlock these bracelets and look the other way. No one can blame you; they ought to have sent a couple of policemen with a slippery cuss like me! Are you listening, Cavendish? Well, I get away . . . you look all over for me, but in the storm and with the snow covering my tracks . . . why, there won't be a breath against you! And I will fade so completely out of your life that you will wonder whether I was, after all, only a dream. You have my word for that! See what it means? It means that you can have Tess. It means that in any other event you can't have her. . . . I am an obstacle worth considering, as you know. So, under the circumstances, don't you think she is worth it? ”

He bent his head toward the Creek in an attitude of listening.

"Save your breath," retorted the younger man through his teeth. "And walk faster, please."

Delany moved an unwilling step forward.

"Then you'll never get her," he warned. "This is not a case where the best man wins! Tess will stick to me as long as she thinks I am alive. I make no idle boast. But if you lose me to-night, I promise you I will make her think that I am dead. You might consider that proposition while we are passing this cosy little ravine."

"You hound!"

Delany laughed.

"You have caught heroics from Kleath, I see; or perhaps you think you have a chance, anyway. Not a ghost of it, my boy, believe me! If I ever get back to Dawson where she can come under the baneful influence of my fascination and my quixotic advice, where I can appeal to her own supersensitive code of honor, I can assure you that she will wait for my return from the penitentiary at New Westminster as faithfully as though we had been married by the Archbishop of Canterbury assisted by the Pope of Rome. Neither you nor any other man will have the ghost of a chance."

Cavendish struggled with a lust to kill. He knew Delany spoke the truth; that neither he nor any other man could hope to win Tess so long as she believed Delany was alive. He asked a chance to escape, to pretend that he was dead. Why should such a man live at all?

The boy wheeled suddenly in the road and seized his prisoner by the throat, strangling the cry which rose there.

"If I considered cheating the law of you," he shouted, "it would be for the satisfaction of killing you myself, here in the middle of the road."

"Let go," gurgled Delany, trying to tear the fingers from his neck. "Think what you are doing — man — it's murder. . . ."

The grip loosened and the hands fell away. He coughed until he got his breath. "You can have her for all I care," he muttered, "I've finished with her . . . only I'm telling you she won't go. Len," he tried different tactics, "don't be hard! You will have everything you want — the girl, position, money. You won't be faced with a hint of disgrace in the Force, and you are leaving, anyhow. Look at me — I have never had a chance . . . honestly. Everything I've had, has come so hard . . . I never did you any harm, Len . . . I don't even owe you

any money. Think, Old Boy, we've always been good pals, haven't we? I never did anything to you. . . ."

"No," repeated the boy, grimly, "you never did anything to me."

"Well, then —" began Delany, hopefully.

"Hold your rotten tongue," commanded the policeman, "and get along faster. I am not keen about your companionship . . . you blighter!"

A pale gleam, which was but the suggestion of light, broke over the sky. The snow had ceased falling, and masses of black crept out of the darkness and threw themselves against the dim, gray background. On these hills, a tree or a clump of trees presently sprang up, the long slender tops of the spruces looking like church spires in that very early morning light. Then a wave of palest amber spread over the charcoal-sketched scene. Somber black and white softened, and as the radiance grew stronger, it seemed to throb across the peaks and crags like a chord of wonderful, soundless harmony. To the trees it gave minuteness of shape and outline. There, a blackened stub threw its bare arms to heaven as though in supplication; here, a tangle of leafless branches seemed bent in an attitude of humility. The little firs, shrouded heavily in white,

swayed daintily, like ballet dancers in the forest.

Pink — warm, glowing pink touched their fluffy, outspread skirts and a gentle wind moved them this way and that. They shook their garments and a shower of diamonds fell.

The sun came up, no longer shrinking and afraid, but boldly and having the effect of pealing anthems, as it swung across the trees.

And under the blanket which Nature had drawn over her naked crags, two women slept.

CHAPTER XII

Dawson was stunned. For a time it could not recover from its horrified stupefaction sufficiently to ask questions; certainly it could not answer them.

There was nothing more to be got from Olie Oleson. He told his story over and over again with maddening monotony, with exasperating sameness of tone, of phraseology, of expletive. . . .

"Ah ban walkin' along past de Foorks," he said, "an' Ah keek som't'ing unt-der de snoo. Ah poosh away de snoo an' see som't'ing w'at look lak leetle an-eemal. Ah peek it oop an it ees a moof . . . but God-t! . . . dere es two foot unt-derneat'!" He stopped, rehearsed his gestures following the discovery and went on, "Ah poosh away some more snoo . . ." he flung out his hands as though trying to beat the remembrance back. "Tess, she face down, all tweest oop, lak leetle ball; de od-her, on she back lookin' straight at me . . . *God-t!*"

The Sergeant at the Forks, to whom Olie had fled with his ghastly news, had nothing to add, and the groups of suddenly sobered revellers, who col-

lected outside the "Barracks" (to which they were refused admission) or gathered round two empty roadside graves in the hope of learning more sensational details, were disappointed.

It had been Cavendish's office to find and tell the doctor. They, with the coroner, drove to the Forks in the early afternoon of that curiously still Sunday. People, waiting on the roadside with morbid expectancy to see them pass, were glad to turn their eyes away after a fleeting glimpse at them. At the inquest, which was brief, a verdict of accidental death from exposure was brought in.

And the road from the Forks to Dawson was once more dotted with clots of fur, which, on closer inspection, resolved themselves into the members of a funeral cortège.

In the doctor's acceptance of the tragedy which had overtaken him, there was an infinity of pathos. His life had been so full of consistent renunciation, it did not occur to him to rebel. He had never withheld for his own use anything of value which would benefit another. His greatest joy had been found in giving joy to others, and he took a sorrowful pleasure in bearing, or helping them to bear, their griefs. Never sparing himself, never demanding or

receiving consideration, he now seemed to feel that even this sacred torture must be shared with others. He seemed to feel a reprehensible selfishness in shutting himself alone with his agony as though denying some one else the privilege which was their due.

He turned most naturally to Kleath and offered him the gruesome hospitality of his home and of the chamber of Death as to one who expected and desired it. He offered it in such a way that Kleath could not refuse without taking from Meredith that in which he found his greatest comfort — the conviction that not only Kleath, but the whole of Dawson had loved his wife.

He led his guest into that still presence as one who gives comfort, not one who sought it. His thoughtfulness for Kleath was harder to bear than any wild, inconsiderate outpourings would have been . . . and the more so because Kleath did not need his pity. He did for Kleath that which he sub-consciously craved some one to do for him.

"I will just go to my room and smoke for a while, Old Man," he said, puckering his mouth and trying to whistle. Then, as Kleath started to leave, "You stay here . . . with her . . . I know you would like to, and I feel sure that she would wish it."

He closed the door softly and was gone.

Kleath looked down at the thing which once had been a woman. If he felt that the pages of Life's Book were, for her, mercifully closed, if he felt the wisdom of that Power who wrote "Finis" so abruptly, where he had looked for "To be continued," he was not, at the moment, conscious of it. Dominating all else was a feeling of awe at the merciless thoroughness with which Nemesis pursues us even in Death. What supreme humor that Olie Oleson, from whose arms she had shrunk in life, should be the man in whose arms she would lie in death, as he bore her from the roadside to the "Barracks"! Kleath wondered if, somewhere in the place of restless spirits, Clare knew this and felt troubled. There was something strangely rebellious about her, even now.

He was standing just where the doctor left him, when the door opened softly and Meredith crept into the room. He entered apologetically, as though ashamed of intruding upon Kleath's sorrow, but as though a voice stronger than his will had called to him to come.

He stood beside his friend, in silence for a space, looking down at the woman who lay so still, and in his eyes was that fettered, struggling thing which Kleath had so often seen. He tried to go away,

but Meredith would not hear of this. He was resolved to give his friend all the grim pleasure possible to be taken from a last few moments with Clare.

"Old Man," he said, huskily, "I know you are thinking of the long farewell. You are wishing that you could take leave of her — without restraint. Speak to her, Kleath, in your own good way . . . kiss her before she goes . . ." he waved his hand indefinitely toward the snowclad hills. "Kiss her good-by, Old Man . . . she was very, very fond of you."

He walked to the window and turned his back upon the room. The habit of the Golden Rule was very strong. Besides, there was not only Kleath to be considered; there was Clare, herself. He felt that she was near enough to know!

Kleath bent over the rebellious face and put his lips lightly to a cold cheek. As he did so a memory like the lash of a whip stung him . . . "but remember, Christopher Kleath, some day you will kiss me of your own free will, and my lips under yours will be as cold and unresponsive as yours are now. . . ."

Somewhere in the place of restless spirits, Clare must have felt a thrill of exultation, for she had accomplished her queer, distorted purpose. Kleath shuddered. *He was horrified!*

Unrestrained, loud-sobbing Dawson crowded into the cabin where Tess lay, and buried her beneath its flowers. It was the very antithesis of that other home where silence and suppression reigned, where formal — kindly — notes took the place of visits, and where the boxes of flowers seemed to breathe of the indifferent florist who arranged them, rather than of the love of those who sent them.

Even Duke was moved as he looked upon the peaceful, childish face.

“Like a flower, herself, ain’t she?” he said, slowly. “I never had much to do with her, seemed as if she might break or get bruised if you touched her, an’ she was such a baby. But the ‘Hall’ won’t ever be the same without her, will it? Damn Delany, anyhow. What does he say?”

“Yes, what does he say?” echoed a dozen hoarse voices. “Did he make her walk out alone?”

No one knew. It was possible Delany had not been asked to say anything; that was a matter for the police, for Len.

But Cavendish had disappeared.

Unlike Meredith, whose age and experience in plumbing the depths of many sorrows gave him poise and self-control, Leonard Cavendish’s youth and his

acquaintance with the first real anguish he had ever known robbed him of his very courage and hurled him into a frenzy of despair.

He could not bring himself to look upon the shell of the woman he had loved, he could not endure the sound of her name upon the lips of others, the sight of their grief was intolerable. He flung himself out into the hills and there he tried to beat out the Thing which was tearing at his heart with its red-hot claws. He struck himself insanely, he struck at objects about him, crazed with a lust to destroy — he knew not what. He fought senselessly with trees, uprooting them where he could, and snapping their branches. He hammered at boulders until his knuckles were raw. He trampled the snow into a mucky mass and then threw himself into it, face downward, and scratched crazily at the frozen earth. He cursed. He prayed.

And late that night when the men in the Barracks were beginning to look at their watches uneasily and at his empty bunk, he stumbled in, an almost unrecognizable mass of mud and blood, an exhausted, wild-eyed creature who looked at them as one who saw them not. They poured a huge horn of raw whiskey into him, undressed him and put him to bed.

Later in the week, they bought his discharge, stuffed him with the necessary papers, thrust his yard of ticket into his hand and sent him away.

So Tiny Tess accomplished her purpose. He went back to England, and alone.

Meredith was the only visitor Delany ever had. On Monday morning, when Sergeant Cottingham unlocked the door of his cell, he was in the act of rehearsing an eloquent plea before an imaginary jury. His legal knowledge warned him that his chance for acquittal was slight, but his abiding faith in the power of trickery and cunning held out a decided hope. His release was merely a matter of cheating the law. To the discovery of legal loopholes, therefore, he gave himself up with such intensity there was little leisure in which to contemplate the circumstances immediately connected with his abortive elopement.

Naturally, he was conscious of a feeling of shame — at the failure of his plans; naturally, he wondered what Clare thought when he did not return; he even speculated on the best manner of approaching her when they met. But paramount, was the regaining of his freedom, and to this end he felt he must concentrate on every detail of his defense.

Other matters could wait.

"The doctor to see you," announced Cottingham, shortly, and withdrew.

Delany shrugged his mental shoulders. A trying "husband scene," he thought; not so trying as some he had experienced, perhaps, but of a necessity, distracting.

"I came to ask if you could tell me anything about Clare," began Meredith, with no attempt at greeting.

Delany darted one of his swiftest glances at his visitor and noted the appalling haggardness of his appearance. "It is like Frank to do all the suffering, himself," he thought, "instead of making the other fellow do his share." Aloud, he answered, "No, I don't believe I can."

He saw that Meredith had expected this.

"I thought you might have heard her say whether she intended to go to Extravaganza — it seemed so unlike her to walk — You saw her so much more than I did," he added, simply.

Delany was thoroughly puzzled. This, obviously, was not an ordinary "husband scene"; no recriminations, no heroics. Yet there was that in Meredith's manner which made him acutely uneasy.

"Why don't you ask *her*?" he demanded.

If dull eyes can be startled and yet be dull, Meredith's expression is explained.

"Has no one told you," he said, tonelessly, "that my wife is dead?"

A whispered ejaculation burst from Delany's lips. Like the rest of Dawson, he was momentarily stunned. Meredith's first question had awakened various possibilities as to Clare's actions subsequent to his arrest . . . she might have gone home, shut herself in her room and refused explanations — that would have worried the doctor; she might have gone home and in the fury of outraged pride made a clean breast of the whole affair — *that* would have worried the doctor; she might, in a moment of madness, have left the Yukon alone — that would account for Meredith's distress. But that she was dead — such a possibility never occurred to him!

Suddenly his flesh crept. Was he in any way held responsible? Had an imaginative and sensation-loving public attached to him a crime of which he was both innocent and ignorant? Were those two bags to be the circumstantial evidence upon which a hostile jury would convict him? Oh, the Law! the Law! He could feel himself frantically struggling in its toils. How often had the noose been slipped

from the neck of the guilty and how easily it seemed to slip over the neck of the innocent!

"How did it happen?" The question almost choked him.

But as the grim, brief tale unfolded itself, he became reassured to such an extent as to feel little other than relief in the way of an emotion. It was only as Meredith turned to go that a few words of sympathy faltered to his lips, and Meredith returned a mechanical thank you. Then Delany caught his arm.

"I say, Frank," he begged, "you will do what you can for me — at the trial, you know? Can't explain it . . . you ought to understand — a doctor." He fairly crushed his pale yellow hair beneath the palm of his hand. "Sudden insane craving to get my fingers on that money — like a man for drink . . . can't explain it! Just madness . . . totally irresponsible, then . . . some kink in the mind, you know!"

Meredith looked back into the room and nodded vaguely.

"Yes, the mind," he said, dully. "I am sorry. Anything I can do —" he felt ineffectually for his medicine case, having forgotten already what he had been asked to do. "The mind —"

He commenced to whistle, but the sound was unpleasant — a queer melancholy little blowing through his lips, without melody or rhythm.

And all Dawson was divided in two parts on the day of the funerals. One part looked dishevelled and red-eyed, employed many handkerchiefs, and walked with much entwining of arms and bodily support. The other drove decorously and in silence, save when some woman would remark, "Well, one can't help feeling sorry for the doctor, no matter what any one else may think. But she was a most peculiar person!"

Tim Meadows's most urgent business on Monday morning was the depositing of his Saturday's receipts. These amounted to \$16,000 in currency, \$14,000 in dust and \$4000 in tabs, giving undeniable testimony that his venture would at least carry the overhead expenses.

The purchase of a second-hand safe from the Alaska Trading Company was a precaution he took towards protecting his Extravaganza interests from any further attempt at a hold-up. A convenient time for an assault upon this receptacle would be hard to arrange, considering that the bar never

closed day or night and that ten men, at least, were in attendance.

"Gosh," said Ben Tisdale and his assistants as they removed their several feet from butter tins, "Gosh, but I'm glad to see that piece of parlor furniture! Mebbe you think this foot-tub effect is pleasant, but you try it onct with a couple of guns trained on your vital parts an' see how you like it!"

Only he and Meadows held the combination of the safe. Each morning at six o'clock, before going to bed, Tisdale deposited the joint receipts from the bar and the gaming tent, and each afternoon, when Meadows reached Extravaganza, he withdrew the bundles of bills, clinking cartwheels and bags of dust, taking or sending them to Dawson's bank, an institution which, for the convenience of the public, kept hours very little shorter than those of the bar itself.

One morning, exactly a week after the opening of the tent, Ben closed the safe with a yawn, turned over the management of the place to Pete Harvey and went off to the cabin and a deserved rest. He was scheduled to report again at four o'clock, but, shortly after noon, violent hands aroused him and a voice demanded,

"What's the combination of the safe?"

Through the haze of semiconsciousness, Ben prepared to defend his secret with a powerful lunge toward the spot whence proceeded the question, but before he could accomplish this, a wet towel was slapped across his face and he found himself confronted by Pete Harvey.

"What's the combination of the safe?" Pete persisted, with the impatience of a man who has asked the same thing many times.

"Why, what the h—— do you want to know for?" queried Ben. "It ain't four, is it?"

"Nope. Only two. But the boss sent me over to ask you. He's been here half an hour tinkerin' with the works an' he can't get the bloomin' safe open. Crowds, an' money pourin' in 'most as bad as last week. Boys redeeming tabs, like wimmen at a bargain sale. Fellers from up the creeks wearing dust like a coat of mail. King MacIntosh just dropped two thousand, cold, on the wheel, an' everybody's lappin' up the booze, as if the Yukon had been fed salt fish fer a week. Write down the combination, Ben, I gotta get back."

Tisdale scratched his head.

"Three rights," he muttered, "— 81. Two left — 60. One right, one left — 55."

Harvey snatched the paper and was off. In a few minutes he was back.

"Can't get in," he panted. "Boss says that's the same dope he tried. He's afeard something's gone wrong with the insides, an' he wants you. Never seen Tim nervous before, but to-day he's like a wet hen."

Tisdale waded through money and the equivalent of money and knelt beside Tim Meadows. He spun the little metal ball this way and that with no result. Certainly, something had gone wrong.

"'Tain't only the temptation, the chanct of another hold-up an' the danger," said Tim, "it's bein' achchelly without annything to put the stuff in! Them's all the boxes Oi could foind, an' they're full already. Coorse Oi could sind it back to Dawson, but by avenin' there'll be twict as much, an' nowhere to put it!"

Perspiration streamed from his painfully-shaven face, his breathing was stentorian, his language sulphuric.

"It was all right this mornin'," complained Ben, during the first pause which ensued. "You must have give 'er a rare old twist."

"That's roight," returned Meadows, bitterly. "Blame me! Oi haven't more'n enough troubles

on me shoulders as it is! Blame me! Oi niver did annything different than before, Ben Tisdale! Av all the toimes in the wur-ruld fer the — thing to be actin' up. . . .”

He glared at Harvey who dumped a pile of change beside him and went off with the empty box.

“Oi'll bet me shur-r-t there ain't anny one this side av 'Frisco' that can fix it. Think av havin' to sind to 'Frisco,' Ben! An' shure, what will we be doin' in the manetoime? An' will ye have the goodness to consider the expinse?”

Still sitting on their robust haunches before the safe, they looked at one another, helplessly. Tisdale's eye roved thoughtfully over the dense crowd on the other side of the counter.

“Seems as if there'd oughter be a safe cracker in all that outfit,” he mused aloud.

“S'pose an' there was,” answered Meadows, following the drift of his thoughts, “what good would it do to get the old — shell cracked, if we couldn't get it minded again? What Oi nade is a reel safe dochter — a man who knows all there is to know about their outsides an' their innards an' who can put it in fur-rust class runnin' ordher. Find *him*,” he dared.

“Barney McCool,” suggested Tisdale, with ill-

timed levity. "He knows everything about — Say, Tim —" A sudden inspiration burst upon him, an inspiration induced by the mention of Barney's name. "Say, Tim — *what about Kleath?*"

Meadows slapped his hip. "Shure, Ben, sometimes ye act as if ye was part human! If any one this side av 'Frisco' can operate on this patient, Chris is the bye. Don't look to me as if a safe was anny more complicated than a linotype machine, eh? Oi'll sind roight over to the cabin an' ask him to sthep over. He's there, because Oi gave him a spécial invitation to come an' bring Goldie. Say, Pa-ther. . . . Pa-ther Harvey, Oi, want ye."

The difficulty was laid before Kleath, who knelt in the center of the trio and followed the directions Meadows gave him. But the safe refused to open, even for him. Tim's hopes dropped a few degrees.

"Shure, an' it looks loike a pleasure thrip fer some feller at my expinse," he said, despondently. "An' consider the risk Oi'm runnin' manewhoile."

"Consider the risk *I'm* runnin'," corrected Ben. "Nobody poked a couple of guns in your face!"

Kleath drummed idly on the metal disc with his fingernails. His brow was creased with an unaccustomed frown.

"Oh, I think I can open it, all right," he said. "I

know this safe quite well. But whether or not I can adjust the mechanism of the lock without proper tools, is another matter. Do you want me to take the risk? "

"Shure Oi do!" Meadows's reply was prompt and hearty. "Begorra, ain't loife wan damn risk after another annyway? If we can get this stuff —" he indicated the money surrounding him — "stowed away at least fer the noight, Oi can make betther arrangemints fer handling it on Monday — or until the safe's insides is cured."

Kleath asked for a piece of sandpaper. The proprietor of the "San Domingo" looked blankly at him. He thought there was not an inch of it nearer than Dawson.

"There will be some at the Forks, I think," said Kleath. "And send some one to the blacksmith's for a file and these other tools."

He scribbled a list on a leaf of his notebook and handed it to Tim. Before the messenger returned, Duke, considering himself invested with special privileges, had joined the group around the safe; and there also Barney had been drawn by the magnetism of Kleath's presence. The latter asked that Inglis be brought, to act as mechanical assistant.

In the big tent a hundred men and half as many

women crowded, ignorant of what was going on behind the bar. Dancing being impossible until Tim's imported hardwood floor arrived, a party of light-hearted revellers galloped through a Virginia reel to the noise of Curly Wainwright's mouth organ. Others, excluded from this terpsichorean discord, beat their hands together or thumped upon the counter and encouraged the reelers, with personal remarks, flattering or contumelious.

"Get some ginger into it," urged a voice. "Gosh, a percession of steam rollers 'd be more lively. That's right, Ermyntude, kick his hat off! Swing yer lady, you boob!"

"Gee, Mame," commented a girl, who had not been asked to dance, "you certainly are light on your feet—I don't think. Onct I seen a fella tryin' to move a grand pi-anna, all by hisself, an' he looked just like Olie tryin' to move you. That's right, Ole Girl. Don't you move a inch—make him drag you every step!"

Kleath cut his nails carefully, then sandpapered the ends of his fingers until they were nearly raw. Heaven knows how he thought he could hear anything in the midst of the wild medley of noises, but he placed his ear against the safe, and, with closed eyes, commenced to turn the shining little ball.

Now and again, he would give a perceptible start, open his eyes quickly, and call out a number to Tisdale. Then backward and forward he would twist the ball once more.

"He can feel something catch," explained Inglis, "when he passes a certain number. He can hear it, too. Those are the little nicks in the wheels as they fall into line and prepare to move in unison when the dog drops. I can't make it very clear to you, although I know the general principles. There — he's felt another catch."

"I can't feel much with my tough fingers," said Kleath, after calling the number to Ben. "As I once heard a fellow say — I couldn't hear a grandfather's clock tick. But we are getting on. In a few moments, I will have her open . . . ah, there she is!"

Meadows's hand fell with violent approval on Kleath's back, and Tisdale set himself at crowding the money into the safe. Inglis chuckled triumphantly, as though he had had a share in the achievement. Duke sat in silent amazement as though seeing limitless possibilities in such mechanical cunning, and Barney made this the occasion for one of his interminable stories.

"Oi knew the same thing to happen in Bolivia," he began, "only much wur-r-se!"

Kleath, sitting on an overturned biscuit tin which had been relieved of its treasure, taking the lock to pieces bit by bit and handing it to Inglis to keep in order, caught a word now and again as he filed, and screwed and fitted.

". . . Political unrest . . . taking . . . form av . . . uprising agin me fri'nd, the President. State militia . . . just recoverin' . . . effects av . . . last revolution . . . no condition to foight. . . . By avenin' . . . town . . . in the hands av . . . rebels . . . me fri'nds foorced . . . take refuge in . . . Capitol."

A somewhat confused description of the seat of Government followed, and of those loyal souls who scorned to consider their personal safety, but prepared to sell the hunted President with their own lives. Then Barney, raising his voice, continued,

"Shure, an' there was but a handful av us . . . a Ginerall or two, a scant dozen av servants, three bankers from New York who had left the metropolis hurriedly, so to spake, mesilf an' the Minister av War! If anny wan can save us, we thought, it is the Minister. He had been so thoughtful . . . he

had seen to it, personally, that all the ammunition was collected from the homes or hidin' places av the faithful, an' brought in secret to the Capitol. Fer safe keepin' he had locked it in the vaults, himsilf. An' he alone had the combination. Then —" Barney's voice rose to a challenging scream — "what think ye that the white-livered hound did? He sneaked off over the postern gate, swam the moat an' joined the rebels! Imagine us, if ye pl'ase . . . less than three dozen min thryin' to defend our ideals an' our lives with empty cartridge belts! The situation was wan av the most desperate Oi iver faced — an' that's no lie, Oi'm tellin' ye! "

He coughed violently but went on in gasps,

"The Prsident said his prayers, an' then he approached his wife an' children. 'Heart's blood,' he said to her, 'Oi'm goin' to give mesilf up. Much as it tortures me to tear mesilf from your arms an' those av our beautiful children, Oi cannot permit all these gallant gintlemen,' sez he, 'to sacrifice their lives fer me.' Oi could tell ye all this in Spanish," boasted Barney, "exactly as he said it, only ye wouldn't understand. 'No, no! Light av me soul,' she begged, 'not just yet. See, we have four more cartridges left, an' ivery toime the Ginerall foires, he hits something . . . don't l'ave me!' she cries, on

her knees. At that moment, three av the servants yells for ammunition . . . they tells us the rebels are swarming over the walls. Shure, an' before ye could wink, the four cartridges were gone, an' we were face to face with death or surrinder. 'Misther McCool,' sez the Prisent's lady, 'hear the prayer av a distracted wife an' mother! Go, yer-silf, to the vaults an' thry yer hand at that combination-toime-lock.'

"Shure, an' there was a moment's quiet whoile the divils outside were draggin' off their dead, an' Oi leapt down the stairs to the cellar where the vaults were located. 'It's no use,' said the Prisent, thryin' to unwind his wife's arms from about him, an' surrinder himsilf to the mob. 'Iverybody has made an effort to open that dure. Let me go, Sun av me Loife!' sez he. 'Not until Misther McCool has failed,' replies the lady, firmly, an' amid the muffled noise av trampin' in the court yard up above, they all stands round with set faces waitin' the result av me effort.

"Oi'm not denyin', moind, that Oi felt exceedingly foolish, as Oi stood between thim an' that solid iron dure, but all av a suddint, something whispered in me ear, as loud an' insistent loike as if it had been a person sp'akin'. 'You turn the handle,' Oi cries

to the General who took precedence over the other wan . . . 'you turn the handle, whilst Oi calls the numbers out. Whist! Thim divils are batterin' at the front dure,' Oi sez. 'We have no toime to lose. Are ye ready?' Oi asks. 'Oi am, *Signor*, a-waitin' upon yer pleasure,' sez he. 'Then turn!' Oi commands . . . '4 — 11 — 44!' An', begorra, ye can belave me or not — the dure swung open. . . . *Oi was roight!*

"A few shots an' it was all over. As a matter av fact, that lyin' scoundrel, the Minister av War, had led the rebels to belave that Oi would accompany him an' take up arms agin the Governmint. An' whin they found Oi was heart an' soul with the Prisident — well, they made terms fer p'ace, immediately.

"Arrah, there was a great demonstration in the Capitol that noight. It would take me a month to tell ye about it, but Oi might just mintion that the Prisident said to me, he said, 'Misther McCool, Oi beg ye to allow me in the name av me Cabinet, to appoint ye,' sez he, 'Minister without Portfolio — at a salary av tin thousand dollars a year — American money,'" Barney added impressively.

A roar of ridicule and skepticism rewarded the raconteur. Even Kleath laughed.

"Well, av coorse, ye can belave me or not as ye pl'ase," remarked the other, offended, "but a glance at the State Records will convince annybody prisint that it's the gospel truth Oi'm tellin' ye!"

Duke's enthusiastic appreciation of Kleath's work that afternoon was genuine. It was surpassed only by that of Meadows himself.

"By golly, you've worked a miracle, Man!" he cried, forgetting to say "Mister Kleath" in the excess of his admiration. "I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes — and with nothing but them little home-made tools! Say —" he called to Farnum — "did you hear what Chris done to that safe?" And as though determined that every one should pay full tribute to a hitherto unrecognized genius, Duke advertised the exploit throughout the entire night.

He drank but sparingly, although none realized it. They mistook his attitude of concentrated thinking for the one with which they were most familiar. He would sit for a long time oblivious to his surroundings, his chin sunk on his chest, his eyes closed. Then, as though having come to an eminently satisfactory conclusion, he would buttonhole the person nearest him and explain minutely the wonder of Kleath's achievement.

Barney's resentment at this change of attitude was obvious, but whether from jealousy or suspicion none could determine, and he set out on the following morning in a very disgruntled frame of mind.

"Ye're a jolly old ass, Chris, as me fri'nd, the Duke av Dunsraven used to say," he scolded. "Hiven knows what fool performance ye'll be givin' the whoile, without me to look afther ye! Oi'm off to me claim — the same as Oi've told ye about — an' Oi'll not be back before Thursday at the latest. Shure, an' ye'll see me comin', with a sack av tails as big as me fist! Ye should see the blobs av yellow stickin' out av the ground! Why, anny one could pick it out with a penknife! But in the manetoime," he admonished, "don't, Chris, darlint, *don't* go an' open anny more doors or safes or jewel boxes or refrigerators or the loike, no matter who asks ye! Oi'm not makin' me request without a r'ason. Will ye promise?"

Kleath laughed and promised. The Irishman clung to him a moment as though he would like to change his mind and stay at home, then he wrung his hand and started off across the honeycombing snow.

CHAPTER XIII

By Monday, Duke's opinions seemed to have altered. One would scarcely have recognized the man who lauded Kleath so warmly on the Saturday before.

Prying open each day with a liquid jimmy had become for him a fixed habit, a habit which rendered his temper exceedingly uncertain, during the morning at least, and sometimes the dark brown glass through which he viewed the world turned even darker, throughout a bibulous afternoon.

It was just after Kleath had left the plant for the day that Duke expressed opinions so divergent from those held at Extravaganza and amazed the boys who were still at work.

"Mighty smart, no doubt," he sneered and jerked his head toward the door through which Kleath had passed, "mighty smart! But these here Smart Alecks never did make much of a hit with me. Did you ever stop to consider how much practice it takes to grow so handy with tools? Look at that work on the Wade's door — pickin' a lock without a light

with a rusty screw and with frozen fingers! Look at that operation on Tim's safe without a pinch of nitro! I bet I know somebody who's got a diploma when it comes to education on locks, an' I bet I'll carry my wad in my pocket. It's safer there than behind any kind of a combination!"

There was an uncomfortable silence.

"No, sir," continued the foreman, with an oath, "I never did feel comfortable with sleight-of-hand guys, an' I'll just slip my roll way down in my jeans and carry it there. That's gotta be my bank."

Inglis, departing from his established custom, reported this conversation to Weatherby, who summoned Duke to his private office.

"It would be just as well," the editor observed, "to use a little restraint in the voicing of such opinions, Duke. Kleath has borne a good deal of unpleasantness from you, I understand, and, while I cannot pretend to control your behavior outside the plant, I do insist upon different treatment during working hours. Is that perfectly clear?"

"I never had to work in the company of a crook," returned Duke, glowering, "an' this ain't no time of life fer me to begin. Besides, it's bad fer the boys — sets 'em a bad example. S'pose I'd shut my mouth an' say no more, don't you reckon they can

put two an' two together? Huh! They'll be watchin' fer the type to fade away outa the racks, next. You see."

Weatherby's face grew stern.

"If you have any definite accusation to make, I am ready to listen and to give Kleath an opportunity of defending himself. But these slanderous innuendoes spread behind his back are cowardly and must stop! Furthermore, your anxiety for the morale of the plant is quite unnecessary. The boys will get on all right, I fancy, and any one who does not want to work with Kleath, can go — can go," he repeated. "He is practically the backbone of this paper, and as I see no chance of replacing such a man, I certainly shall do everything in my power to induce him to stay. That's all, I think."

Duke shuffled to the door.

"I s'pose you think that safe-pickin' stunt comes natural to a feller," he flung over his shoulder. "Well, just let me tell you, chief, it's natural only to a man with a 'record.'"

Weatherby was moved by a desire to have the last word.

"Perhaps. But I have noticed that detectives have not trailed him, that no snowstorm of bills has enveloped him, that he lives a clean and decent life,

and that even when he came, he had neither the penitentiary pallor nor the jail-bird's limp — which is more than can be said of many other residents of Dawson! You might try to put two and two together, yourself, Duke. That is all I care to say."

Weatherby may or may not have attached any importance to Kleath's latest mechanical achievement. It was difficult to say, for his philosophy of life decreed that a man's present belongs to his employer, his future lies in the lap of the gods, but, by Heaven, his past is his own!

If his caution was disregarded during the days which followed, no one knew of it from Kleath, who seemed to give Duke's sullenness, his sneers and his insulting politeness even less serious consideration than before. None could say that he ever heard the foreman's malicious conjectures, none dreamed of accusing him of cowardice. It was the boys who felt it incumbent upon them to prevent a fight and they exerted themselves to keep the two men apart.

Kleath's leisure time was divided between Meredith and Goldie. From one he still made the kindly pretense of taking a consolation he did not require; to the other he offered an unobtrusive sympathy which was gratefully accepted. His companionship

seemed to be the only relief Goldie found from the shock following Tess's death. He made her feel that he appreciated her loss without adding to it the burden of his own sincere grief.

"You are the only person who seems to understand," she said to him one night, "that it isn't just because Tess is—gone that my heart aches so intolerably. It isn't even the cruel way she died. . . . It is because I missed the opportunity of doing something for her which ought to have been done . . . you remember how we were going to try to take her from Delany? To let her die without ever having made an effort to bring her a little happiness, to let her die possessed by that pitiful idea of her own wickedness—oh, Chris, it nearly kills me! I wish I had done something—anything, even the wrong thing . . ."

As her character unfolded like the petals of a flower, each phase seemed to him more beautiful than the last. As an untutored child, during the first weeks of their acquaintance, Goldie was charming; as a student assimilating quickly and easily, she was a delightful companion; as a girl of courage and daring, she commanded his wondering admiration; as a woman, with shy laughter, coquettish smiles, arch subtleties, she was a being who mystified and

magnetized; but as a sorrow-stricken friend, she made the strongest appeal of all.

His visits to the "San Domingo" and to the Meadows' cabin increased in frequency, and nods and winks followed him as he went.

Thursday came but Barney did not return. Friday and Saturday passed without a sign from him. Goldie began to fret. It was her habit to worry over all the derelicts she knew, to try to find for them fair harbors and safe anchorage, and Barney, she felt, was her special charge.

"I would think nothing of it," she explained, "if I did not know that he took provisions only to last two or three days."

"He may have struck it rich, though, and that would enable any one to live on half rations," said Kleath. "Or he may have run across a cache, or, what is most likely, he may have bought grub from people nearabout. I wouldn't worry, Goldie. You are letting your nerves get the better of you, you know."

Six months ago, he would have put his arms around her and comforted her as though she had been a child. Now, he sat and looked at her wondering why he did not, restrained and baffled by an

unanalyzed diffidence he felt of late in her presence.

"Nobody wants to worry, Chris!" She smiled a little. "I have always thought it such silly advice — to urge a person not to worry. The only thing to do is to remove the cause, and then one can stop. I am going to ask Dad to send somebody to look him up, to-morrow, if you will give me the directions. Then, I shall feel better."

"If that is your idea," said Kleath at once, "I will go, myself."

"Oh, will you?" she was vastly relieved. "Thank you, so much, Chris. That will give me more comfort than anything."

After a good deal of searching, he found the bit of paper with which Barney had illustrated his unique invitation. In utter bewilderment, he took the thing to Buck.

"I can't make head or tail from these scrawled lines," he said, explaining his purpose in deciphering them. "Can you give me anything more definite?"

"'Bout the best thing I can do, fer ye, Pard," said the old miner, "is to take ye by the hand an' lead ye out there. Nobody could make anything outer that . . . it's a cinch Barney ain't no surveyor. But I can make out the gen'al direction, an' we'll find him."

Early Sunday morning they started. Goldie insisted upon loading them with tins of soup, condensed cream, bread, and a few simple remedies. Buck displayed a fine scorn at this last precaution.

"I'm already branded," he said.

"What?"

"I'm already branded," he repeated. "A brand, my girl, is something worn on the hip either by man or beast. I don't care which you call me. But I know that Barney ain't goin' in fer pill swallerin' when he can get something that slips down so much easier."

Over the Dome they went through slush and slime and soggy moss a foot in depth. Some camps they skirted, some they passed directly through, and men looked from their shoveling just long enough to call a cheery greeting.

Under ordinary circumstances, Kleath would have welcomed the opportunity to stop and watch miners in the process of "cleaning-up." He had seen something of the winter work. He had seen the glow from many fires lighting night after night the perpetual gloom out on the hillsides and the creeks; he had seen men digging at the ground thus thawed and shoveling it into "dumps." He had even lowered himself into caverns, between forty

feet of frozen wall, watching men, who followed the course of a capricious vein, tear deeper and deeper into the stubborn earth. But he had never seen freshets released from the ice-bound summits of the hills. He had never realized how, for a few short weeks, Nature tried to compensate for the meagreness of her favors throughout the winter, how her streams, tumbling through creek-bed and washing down the sides of gullies, were diverted into hundreds of sluice boxes into which tons of "dump" were shovelled, there to be separated by the swiftly-running water — earth from gold. He had never realized how a man's fortune was bound up in that short, warm smile of spring, and his urgent need for cleaning-up the whole of his dump; for, if misfortune overtook him during that brief season, he had to sit patiently under the hot dry sigh of summer, and through the long, cold leer of winter until the freshets ran again.

Occasionally, they passed close to a lonely hillside shack, hardly more than a lean-to, and far removed from purling rill or tumbling cascade. Here a man patiently swung his rocker, alternately filling the hopper from his dump and pouring in dipperfuls of melting snow.

"Gosh," Bill would snort, "I never could see how

them farmers stick at minin' when they've got to locate away from streams! Shakin' yer dump to pieces, like popcorn, always seemed sorter rivallin' Nature. 'Course, there *have* been cases where some rube has just happened on a good thing, an' where he could take more outen his rocker in a day than a lot of other fellers could wash in sluices in a week. But not often." He chuckled. "I reckon they think the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world, eh, Chris? So it might, if there was enough in the cradle. D'ye reckon that the feller who wrote that pome had in mind the Yukon?"

Just before noon he stopped and took a careful survey of his surroundings.

"Ain't so sure at that, I got my bearings," he grunted. "Wouldn't ye just know that Barney'd pick a place like this to locate?" He studied the wavering lines again. "However, we're trackin' him down, all right, I guess."

They had entered a little valley, a desolate wilderness of sharp-nosed rock and stunted scrub. Through this they ploughed, slipping over fallen trees, sinking into the slimy moss and sometimes wading in water which was hidden beneath a tangle of rotten sticks and a loose filling of gravel. Across a thin, brown stream meandering carelessly between

the sloping sides, they pushed, and over a little rise. Down another hill and up again, up a steep, craggy place, sparsely covered with a stingy growth of ill-formed spruce. The appearance of that hill reminded Kleath of an old, old man's unshaven cheek.

"I reckon down there's the gully," said Bill, "an' now we've got to keep our eyes skinned fer the five spruces like a letter V. Why, look, Chris — there's the lot!"

To the right of the east point they turned and presently Bill cried,

"There's what Barney calls a shack! No more'n less than a few rough uprights with boughs laid acrost fer a roof an' boughs wove in at the sides. No chimbley, no door, no nuthin'. Must be kinder cool sleepin' in there."

They agreed to surprise the isolated miner. He was sleeping, possibly, and the two men decided to prepare his dinner before arousing him. As they drew nearer, Buck's professional eye roamed over the premises in search of a dump of some description, but there was nothing to indicate that any digging had been done. An old rocker leaned against a tree.

"Maybe the dump is at the back," suggested Kleath. "Or perhaps he has staked down nearer the stream. Poor Barney!"

He passed round to the back of the structure, which Barney had grandiloquently called a cabin, and poked about in the slush. There were certainly a few hollows in the foot of moss which covered the frozen earth, but they must have been made months ago. It occurred to Kleath that this was not Barney's claim, at all, that it was a spot gladly abandoned by some disappointed tenderfoot. There was no evidence of a fire, now that he thought about it. He had just turned back to call Buck's attention to the fact, when the old miner's voice, sharp and arresting, reached him.

"Kleath," he called. "Come here, quick!"

His great, burly figure entirely stopped the opening of the shack, and Kleath could not see beyond it. But as Bill backed out to let him enter he saw something lying on the ground, face downward, and the truth burst upon him.

Barney's pack lay just where he must have dropped it as he staggered and fell. There was indisputable evidence that he had died from hemorrhage, and that he must have known that the end was near was proven by a paper which he still clutched in his rigid hand.

The two men looked at one another.

"I want C. Kleath to bury me, himself," was scrawled thereon. "Dig — back — cabin. For God's sake, carry out — last wish — dyin —"
"McCOOL "

"This is horrible," cried Kleath, "horrible! I simply could not bring myself to do it. Just to throw the poor little fellow into the ground . . ."

Buck took a more practical view. "And nothing to dig with that I can see." Then, dominated by the miner's slavery to superstition, he continued, "Still, I'd hate to go agin his last wishes, if I was you."

"So should I," agreed the other, "but the thought is so utterly revolting. It's indecent! I can't imagine his reason . . ."

"He musta had one," argued Bill. "I'll see if there's any kinduv tools around. We've gotta job cut out fer us, Chris, an' no mistake."

Sickening over his gruesome task, Kleath tried to prepare the husk of Barney McCool for its weird resting place. When he had done all that was possible, he joined Buck at the back of the cabin.

A rusty pick with a broken point had been found, and with this Bill was making a determined assault upon the earth, frozen to a rock-like consistency below the heavy covering of moss.

As he succeeded in deepening the holes already there, Kleath built small fires in them, and thus they alternately thawed and dug until late in the afternoon.

Suddenly, Bill fell to his knees with a cry. He scratched furiously in the loose lumps of earth, blowing on them and polishing them against his clothes.

"Kleath!" he yelled, holding out a pile of dirt in his hands which shook and trembled. "God! I mighta guessed the reason. . . . Look here!"

Kleath looked.

"What is it?"

"What is it?" repeated the miner, great sobs of excitement shaking his body. "It's color . . . it's pay dirt . . . it's gold, *gold*, GOLD!"

Kleath dropped to his knees and tore at the unthawed earth. "Are you sure?"

"Sure? What d'ye take me fer, a farmer? There's hundreds an' hundreds of dollars right here," sobbed Buck. "He was right, pore feller! There'll be tails as big as his thumb. . . . Put in yer pegs, Chris, an' let's lose no time rushin' to the Record Office. Barney's Claim," he kept repeating. "Barney's Claim! Pore boy . . . pore boy!"

CHAPTER XIV

There was an immediate stampede to "The Liar's Rest," as Dawson memorially designated the new gold field, and in an incredibly short time the little valley was staked from end to end. Men relinquished assured positions to which substantial salaries were attached, and fought for two hundred and fifty feet of ground which might or might not yield them up the great secrets of Nature. It was not unusual to surprise some fellow, with a fifty-pound pack, sneaking off in the middle of the night in the hope of "beating the other man to it." And Barney exemplified Montaigne's cynicism that one has to die to be praised.

Although Buck staked the claim adjoining Kleath's, he found nothing more interesting than the bones of some long-buried animal. But the miner's passion for handling pay dirt and a strong curiosity as to the extent of Barney's discovery having been thoroughly aroused, he offered to work Kleath's claim on a percentage and managed to take out a thousand dollars' worth of dust before the end of the

annual clean-up. That was but a small proportion of the subsequent yield.

The annual clean-up!

That was the time when Dawson hummed ceaselessly like a great, restless hive. That was the time when men who had toiled below the earth's surface in perpetual night, who had borne indescribable hardships in the amassing of anything from a few hundred to many thousand dollars, crowded into town determined to paint it a wonderful and brilliant crimson, even though such thorough artistry should consume the whole of their pile. Money was the most plentiful thing in Dawson then . . . sacks of it, flung about as carelessly as though it were so much sand.

There was a slack season at Extravaganza for two or three weeks, for miners, who throughout the winter had known no companionship save that perhaps of a "pard" or a dog, were lured by the sounds of "town" with its swarming hundreds and its choice of virile pleasures. It seemed some nights as though the walls of the "San Domingo" must bulge outward with the strain the dense crowds put upon them.

"I never miss a night durin' clean-up," Inglis told Kleath. He moistened his type in the manner

Nature provided and polished it with a narrow, stiff brush. . "It's worth a year's pay to sit down quiet an' watch that rabble. Always did put me in mind of some kind of op'ra, or one of them plays where there's a mob scene. Never any stillness, never any quiet; everybody movin' . . . movin' . . . everybody yellin' an' bellerin'! Lord, I don't know how to tell you the way it strikes me! That grand mixture of mud an' muck an' filth, of whiskey an' champagne an' tobacco! Seems as if it had oughter make you sick, but it don't. Think of hundreds of people all havin' a good time, the best time they've had for a year! Imagine hundreds of 'em thinkin' of nothing else but happiness. Why, Chris, honest, it's simply grand! You couldn't keep a grouch there, no matter how hard you tried. It'd just nachelly be absorbed in the gen'al hilarity, an' the first thing you'd know, you'd just be lifted right up off'n your two feet an' swept along on the crest of the fun, shoutin' an' singin' with the rest of 'em!"

He stopped, a faithfulness to detail prompting him to remark,

"Course, there's bound to be trouble. There's a lot of them gazabos, specially the foreigners, who don't know the difference between a fight an' a good time. The N. W. M. P. is kept pretty busy. Yes,

I'll give you that tip — keep your eyes peeled for trouble, but don't miss the show."

Trouble there was in plenty.

Mingling with the odor of decaying vegetable matter which always accompanied the thaw, with various heavy, pungent, perfumes, with the reek of kerosene and human effluvium; mingling with bad whiskey and cheap champagne and stale tobacco, was the flow of much thick red blood. Above the din of scraping fiddles, the blast of raucous cornet, the pandemonium of polyglot tongues, women's high-pitched laughter and the curse of dead brokes, would rise a warning shout, then a muffled thud followed by splintering glass and a heavy fall. A sweating, swaying mass would thicken to a crowd as one by one the miners joined the fight, only to give way before the unassailable authority of the one uniform which could have dominated them.

Kleath took Inglis's advice. He kept his eyes "peeled for trouble" and he went to the "San Domingo" every night. Not that he experienced the same delight in the varied monotony of the scene as did Inglis, but because of a half-hesitant appeal from Meadows.

"Oi hope ye'll not find the 'Hall' too vivacious, so to spake," said he. "Ye know Oi'm always glad

to have ye round, Chris. The clean-up's a pretty rough toime . . . an' Oi try to kape a special strict watch over Goldie, fer shure, an' she's a grand soight fer a man who hasn't laid oyes on a skur-rut fer six months!" He sighed. "Oi can't be iverywhere . . . an' what with thryin' to privint a murdher or two, seein' that no swindlin' goes on, an' attindin' to such minor details as the servin' av the cattle, Oi don't know what leisure manes, from mornin' till — the next mornin'. Not that Oi'm complainin' fer mesilf, ye understand, but Oi could ate me heart out, worryin' over Goldie!"

Kleath found his own heart troubled him on account of Goldie. The truth opened before him with startling clarity, when he realized that there was no one else to whom he cared to talk of Barney. It suddenly came to him that a sense of responsibility toward the paper had been but a feeble link in the cable which had bound him to Dawson. He realized for the first time that Goldie had always meant to him something better, more precious than he had ever known; like an elusive perfume, like a purifying breath in a foul-smelling place, like a faint color in the hated murk of winter's gloom, like a soft harmonious song, modifying his days' discords, she had entered and sweetened his life. For her he bore

the trial of Clare's advances, for her he bore his quiet, unresting, boundless hatred of Delany, for her he curbed his contempt for Duke, avoiding an open rupture, avoiding — well, possible disclosures.

He lifted the skin from off himself and looked, amazed, beneath. His heart pounded under its deludingly quiet covering, his veins throbbled. He felt as he might had he removed a canvas from one of the huge, still presses, to see its arms in motion, to hear its purring grind!

Although he was sitting, he had the gone sensation below his waist, as of a man who has had his knees knocked from under him. He looked at himself rather helplessly with the manner of one who says, "There, you have done it! Now, how am I going to punish you!"

The obvious thing was to leave the Yukon — to run away. He winced. He had run into the Yukon . . . now to run out of it! He picked a thought out of the confused jumble in his coldly-aching head and turned it over gingerly. As a small child he held grasshoppers, so . . . ready to fling them away, should they leap upward toward his face. He might bury his past — cover it up forever and stay in the Yukon near Goldie without ever letting her know! He snapped his jaws together resolutely.

He would tell her everything. She would know sooner or later — if he stayed. And he did not wish to go. . . .

Picking his way over the rapidly-thawing muskeg which formed the support of Dawson City, Kleath turned toward the river front and the "San Domingo" one evening shortly after nine. He was impressed by the number of strange faces in the restless crowds, feeling like an alien in a place with which he had thought he was familiar. Ladies, whose cheeks reflected the brilliant glory of a sunset, held their skirts high and exhibited, in most cases, an admirable solidity of limb, as they trod the two trestle-supported planks which Dawson termed a sidewalk.

Beside and below them, ploughing through a disgusting depth of mud, moved crowds of men, and, although they were swallowed dozens at a time by one or another of the many dance halls, there seemed to be, like the giant's teeth, dozens more springing up in their place.

A small man disputed with a group of sprightly ladies the right to monopolize the sidewalk. At least he balanced himself on the outermost edge and endeavored to refute the theory that two bodies cannot occupy the same place at the same time. The

ladies, playfully indignant at such encroachment upon their acknowledged preserves, gathered round him in a semi-circle, and pushed him off into a large puddle. Muddy water splattered in all directions and the men near enough to suffer whooped with fury. They in turn splashed into the puddle and did to the little man as they had been done by; and, while this watery war was in progress, the ladies, the instigators of the trouble, gathered up their skirts and fled, shrieking with laughter.

The stranger was ineffectually dabbing at the spots and blobs on his clothes, when Kleath came past.

"Can you tell me which of these joints is the 'San Domingo'?" he inquired, sullenly.

"I am on my way there," replied Kleath. "I will show you."

He deduced a number of facts from a glance at his companion, who had assuredly not come in from the creeks. He wore a very new suit of cheap material and poor cut. His boots looked as though they pinched and caused him pain as he slipped through the sticky mud with a slightly uneven step. He blinked in the light, which at nine o'clock was still strong, and made a queer, spasmodic grimace as he did so. But the man's most distinguishing characteristic was his extreme pallor. In comparison with

the wind-burned, frost-nipped countenances of those about him, his looked like a blade of grass which has lain for months under a board and from which all the color has faded.

Arrived at the "San Domingo" he made straightway for the bar with a muttered invitation to Kleath to join him. But the latter made a hasty excuse. He had caught sight of Goldie, whose eyes met his with what he thought was an appeal to be saved from the unwelcome attentions of Joe Duke.

"Well, here is *Mister Kleath*," remarked the foreman, rising as though in some tacit manner he had received his *congé*. "That's hard lines, because I haven't even had a dance. But don't forget you've promised me a waltz, later — one waltz at least, eh Goldie?"

She promised with suspicious readiness as though eager to accept any condition which would rid her of him for a time, and she realized that this was patent to him, by the look he flung at Kleath as he left them and walked across the room to the bar. She felt ashamed at her lack of control, and vaguely uneasy.

Meadows himself had just served the pallid little stranger. He did not evince the same hospitable interest in Conrad Haynes as was his usual custom

toward pilgrims from the "Outside." He noticed that his guest continually shifted his position at the rail, so that he might avoid, in so far as possible, exposing his back to his fellow men. He noticed, too, that at any sudden shout he would give a nervous start. Indeed, his whole manner suggested a ducked head and a crooked, defensive right arm. Tim shoved a succession of whiskeys at him, grudgingly, as though regretting the waste of so much good material and accepted payment for them with an eye suspicious of counterfeit.

"Oi'll bet me shur-rut," he soliloquized, "somebody owes him a good, swift kick. That guy's jest nachelly festerin' with maneness, he is! Ye can see it by the way he looks at iverybody, an' by the way he snatches at his glass as if annybody was goin' to grab it out av his fist. It'll do no harm to kape me oyes on that bur-r-rud!"

But as the evening wore on and the demands of business pressed more heavily upon him, he forgot about the stranger. He would have been inordinately surprised to see Duke, usually so distrustful of newcomers, exchange a few voluntary remarks with Conrad Haynes; he would have been utterly amazed to know that parody of a greeting marked the first interview for three years between old friends.

"Got through O. K., I take it," said Duke, opening the conversation.

The other nodded. He stood with his back to the wall.

"This afternoon's stage?"

Haynes jerked his head up and down again. "Followed your directions," he said. "No trouble."

"You weren't the only passenger?" asked Duke, with an interest which argued something deeper than appeared in the simplicity of the question.

"Nope. There was a cargo of currency along, too," Haynes answered. "Under police escort all the way . . . very interesting . . ."

"Sure," returned Duke. "A couple of hundred thousand dollars, I heard. Bank's gotta keep a ton of it on hand to meet the demands of the miners when they turn in their dust after the clean-up. Usta bring it here — see them old signs hangin' over there?"

He pointed across the room, where, above the gaming tables, cards swung crookedly, advising men in the following terms:

DON'T OVERPLAY YOUR SACK
HAVE YOUR DUST WEIGHED BY US
WE ARE HONEST AND OUR SCALES ARE RIGHT

Haynes looked and nodded.

"Yes, sir, they usta bring it here," Duke repeated, "in pokes. You've heard of a 'poke of gold'? But it's handier usin' currency — *cheechaco*, as they call it . . . an' the bank's real convenient . . . open till midnight."

He made this explanation in the manner of a "sourdough" to a tenderfoot, and he looked round to see whether it had been overheard and appreciated. Finding that no one stood near, he lowered his voice slightly and asked,

"Everything set?"

The man of few words nodded once more.

Duke jerked his head backward.

"See that door behind me — just beside the gallery stairs? Well, slip through there when you get a good chanct, an' go on into the room at the end of the passage. Turn down the lights, and flatten your hide behind the door. I'll bring in the girl first, an' he will follow. You know the rest. Get me?"

Haynes melted into the crowd and Duke set out to find Goldie. As he had expected, she was with Kleath, and he could have laughed with a sort of brutal exultation as he saw the aversion with which she prepared to resign herself to the fulfilment of her promise.

"My waltz," he cried, catching her hands and pulling her to her feet. His manner always carried the suggestion of coercion, as though he compelled her by his superior physical strength, by the actual rough handling of her, to give him his way.

A flame of white-hot fury leapt into Kleath's eyes. He felt as he did the first night of his coming to Dawson, when, through an act of Duke's, the world turned red before him. He wanted to feel the foreman's jaw against his fist once more, he wanted to snatch Goldie out of his arms, again — forever.

But Duke enjoyed Meadows's confidence almost as fully as he himself did. Goldie suffered his attentions, and her father did not see that she "suffered" them. Therefore, what could he, Kleath, do?

"Just one little waltz, *Mister Kleath*," said Duke, as though ironically begging a favor which Kleath had the power to bestow. "Just two minutes of a waltz and then I will give her back to you — when you come for her."

He placed his arm ostentatiously around Goldie and led her out into the room.

They were not completely lost in the maze of crazily-whirling couples who crowded the floor, for Duke kept his partner on the edge of the throng where Kleath could see her plainly. He appeared

to dangle her temptingly before him; indeed, his manner was such that he seemed to be making an endeavor to goad Kleath into an open fight for her. He nearly succeeded.

Kleath had found no opportunity to tell Goldie what he wished. They had hardly been alone all evening. From no shrinking or cowardly procrastination, but from a liking for fitness, he decided to tell her as he took her home. With the knowledge of his sentiments toward her, confessed now to himself, he found it more difficult than ever to surrender her to Duke, to watch her in the arms of so coarse a creature.

The musicians raced inharmoniously on to the end of the dance and stopped with a crash, *fortissimo*. There was much gasping for breath, and much gasping for drink. Kleath could see Tim busily throwing the girls their blue checks as they filed past the end of the bar, but Duke and Goldie had disappeared.

It required several minutes of sinuous wandering to locate them. Goldie stood with her back to him. Duke faced him, his hand on the knob of the door leading into Tim Meadows's private office. Unreasonable as it seemed, Kleath could imagine that he was asking Goldie to go into that room with him.

He was right. Before he could reach her, Duke flung open the door, half pulled, half thrust the girl through and slammed it behind him.

Kleath hesitated. Under ordinary circumstances, he would have waited to claim Goldie until she came back into the "Hall." But these circumstances were by no means ordinary. He never remembered such a thing occurring before, save on the occasion when together they assisted in Clare Meredith's escape. Goldie never permitted *tête-à-têtes*, and Kleath knew that Meadows would be furious had she done so, regardless of the identity of the man. Furthermore, he knew that she had gone with Duke protestingly, and he placed but little dependence on the honor of the man.

He opened the door and stepped into the dimly-lighted passage. He heard Goldie's surprised tones.

"Why, the light is burning out. . . . I must tell Dad. . . . Well, Joe, what is the wonderful thing you must show me, in here? Please be quick. I want to go back."

He heard Duke laugh, and say,

"In a minute — in a minute, Sweetheart. You must give me a kiss, first!"

He saw the girl recoil, and Duke's hand fall on

her shoulder. Then with a leap, he was in the room reaching for the man's throat.

"Damn you," he heard himself say, as a scream rang out, as a terrific blow fell upon his head from behind, and the sky suddenly opened, showering him with myriads of stars. Then he stumbled forward to his knees, and the floor rose obligingly to meet him.

CHAPTER XV

He came to with the sound of a woman's sobbing beating in upon his consciousness. He suffered acute pain at every gasping breath and his head felt as though some one wrenched it between metal compresses. He opened his eyes but could see nothing. The blackness of the grave enveloped him. It was a thick, musty, choking blackness.

He tried to move and found it impossible. He was too dazed for a moment to know why. He thought himself in the midst of a horrible nightmare as he tried to turn over. He groaned and the sobbing ceased.

"Who is there?" he asked.

"Chris — oh, Chris . . ." it was Goldie's voice that answered. "I thought they had killed you!"

Slowly a vague remembrance returned.

"Chris —" She bent over him and murmured against his face, "Are you much hurt?"

"No," he lied. "But I seem to be bound. Can you untie me?"

"I am tied, myself," she sighed. "And oh, but the cords do hurt."

Flames of rage danced before his eyes and lighted up the dusty murk. He cursed below his breath.

"Perhaps if you could get your hands against my teeth —" he suggested.

She was not bound very carefully. Indeed, as Kleath bit at the knots, he began to suspect that Duke had not intended to keep his victims helpless for any length of time. Such humaneness, under the circumstances, was quite inexplicable.

Goldie free, it was but the work of a moment for her to search Kleath's pockets for a knife and to cut the cords which bound his ankles and his wrists. She pulled them from the flesh into which they had eaten with a woman's shrinking, sick at the thought of the oozing wounds she could feel but could not see.

"Come!" he rose and took a staggering step forward, "Come, Goldie, let's get out of this. Where is the door? In the dark, I seem to be a bit twisted."

"Get out?" she cried to him. "Why, Chris, we can't get out —"

"We can't? What is the reason, please? And

what has happened to the light — or is it my head? I can't even see you! ”

She felt her way towards him and laid her hand on his arm.

“ Poor boy,” she murmured. “ There never was any light. Don't you realize that we are not in the ‘ Hall ’? We are in the upstairs room of the old deserted road house, five miles from Dawson.”

“ Goldie! Surely, this is some horrible dream! ”

“ I wish it were, and I wish to God that I had never seen Joe Duke. . . . Oh, if I had only treated him like the scoundrel he is . . . just you wait until I tell Dad! ”

Kleath tried to compress his head to its normal size between his two hands. He tried to remember distinctly what had happened in the earlier part of the evening, what had led up to this outrageously high-handed kidnapping. That he was imprisoned in the middle of the night with Goldie Meadows in a deserted road house five miles from Dawson, was almost too fantastic for belief. It was due to his splitting head and the welts on his ankles and his wrists, which gradually convinced him that the impossible had occurred and that the whole situation was not a figment of his own imagining.

“ Tell me first,” he said. “ I will get my wits

together in a moment. You went off to dance with Duke, didn't you? Yes, I remember . . . then I tried to find you — I saw you go into the little office with him and I followed, wasn't that it? I know, now — I saw him trying to — kiss you! Then —" He broke off and shook his head impatiently. "I say, Goldie, what made you go in there with Duke, anyway?"

"Just the same thing which has made me try to endure him all these months," she answered, hesitatingly. "I suppose you will be angry, Chris, and you will call me a fool, but — but — well, it was like this — I began to notice ages ago, that just as I treated Joe Duke, so he treated you! There are hundreds of instances I could tell you; for example —" she spoke rapidly now, as though afraid he would not hear her out — "I refused to dance with him one night, and the next afternoon, although he knew you and I had arranged to have tea with Tess, he kept you working at the plant. Remember? And once when I would not let him walk home with me, because he was horribly drunk, I found that he was sober enough to tamper with your machine and put it out of commission. I could go on for an hour, and could prove to you that these were not coincidences, they were part of a design. He knew I realized

this, even though you were stupidly blind to it, Chris, and he used to terrify me with his covert threats! You don't know what awful things he used to hint about you!"

"But for heaven's sake —"

"Don't interrupt me, please, and don't, above all things, consider that I martyred myself or did anything heroic. Not at all! I simply tried to be kind to a man I disliked and distrusted. I might have tried quite regardless of — of — I mean without any reason. It was good discipline. But to-night — Oh, Chris, you don't know how he looked at you! I was terrified. So, when he insisted upon showing me something in Dad's room, I had only one thought — to avoid giving him annoyance." She broke off to add, "All this is not a bit what I meant to say; it does not express what I really thought and felt. It does not explain how I hated the man, how I hated to give in to him, and yet how I feared to refuse him. And you see, Chris, I am not such a fool, after all, for my fears were realized. In my worst moments of terror, however, I never dreamed of his doing anything like this to you."

"He struck me?" asked Kleath.

"No. It was a strange man, small, awful looking; a man with a face like ashes and eyes that glit-

tered like those of an animal. He must have been hiding behind the door. He had a piece of lead pipe . . ." she shuddered against him. "I shall have the sound of that blow forever in my ears!"

He put his arms about her and held her close. She clung to him and caught her breath in a sob.

"Never mind that, just now, Little Girl. What did they do next?"

"Bound us and lowered us through the window into a closed buggy."

"Through the window?" Kleath forced a laugh. "That window has played a prominent part in my life here. This is the third time. . . . Then?"

"Pinkie Wade and the pale creature drove us furiously out here. The strange beast held a revolver to your head the whole time, and threatened to shoot you if I made the least sound or called for help. I believe he would," she whispered.

"God!" muttered Kleath. "They planned this thing well!"

"—and when they got out here I thought they would kill you dragging you upstairs while I stood by, helpless, watching them." She fell to sobbing again.

Comforting her, he held her close, in a sense unconscious of it. He felt as though he had been

starving for months, and had suddenly been given food; as though he had been cold for months and had suddenly been surrounded by warmth. He felt relieved of a weight, an ache. He bent his head and she raised her lips. They almost met as she whispered,

"The last thing Joe said was that he was sending us into Paradise. . . . What did he mean, Chris? Is he coming here to kill us?"

Kleath straightened with a jerk. He put Goldie roughly from him, staggered to the wall and stood there, breathing unevenly. "Sending them into Paradise . . ."

There was something grimly sinister behind those words. What *did* they mean? Did the foul mind of the man picture Kleath tempted, and surrendered to the Beast because Goldie Meadows was flung, helpless, into his arms? Was that their Paradise? Or was Duke dealing in irony, condemning him like some modern St. George to wrestle with his Dragon through interminable hours of Hell?

"Chris?" Goldie cried, sharply.

"Well?"

"What is the matter? I am afraid."

"Don't touch me," he commanded. "Let me think."

He was glad he had not kissed her. Even in that Duke would have scored. His determination to make no concession to the possible purpose of such a man, forced him to an unnecessary harshness of manner which was so exaggerated that at another time it would have been amusing.

Goldie did not resent it. She realized that it was the result of Kleath's extremely delicate consideration for her, completely at his mercy. At the same time, her whole being sang with joy in another thought, a pardonably human thought for a girl who had been reared amongst the roughest of men, and who was radiantly, gloriously in love for the first time. She, like Duke, gave undue prominence to the idea of a Dragon, she thrilled to think that she could unloose the Beast, red-jawed and strong, but she resolved to prevent, rather than precipitate, a struggle, so she stood patiently in the middle of the room where he had left her and waited.

Kleath found clear thinking intensely difficult, not alone because of the pain in his head, but because he was acutely conscious of Goldie's presence. He kept trying continually to project himself into her mind, to see with her eyes, to feel with her senses, to think with her thoughts. Had she stumbled upon Duke's motive, yet? he asked himself. To prevent

her from doing so, to manufacture some plausible reason for the kidnapping, to shield her from the degradation of realizing what he fancied was the true object, Kleath gave himself up for a space. He assured her that they were in no danger of being murdered, he muttered something about Duke's hoping to bring him, Kleath, into her father's bad graces, and even as he talked, disconnectedly, unconvincingly, he was asking himself the question . . . Was this succumbing to, or resisting of, temptation, after all, Duke's sole object in going to such dangerous lengths? Was it for that alone he would risk Tim Meadows's demoniacal fury and Kleath's cold anger? Was it reasonable to suppose that he would cast the girl whom he desired into the arms of the man he hated, without some deeper, more subtle motive? Obviously not.

"But whatever it is," Kleath unconsciously spoke aloud, "the first thing to do is to try to get out of here."

"Yes," said Goldie. "Of course we can try."

The few matches his pockets contained revealed the fact that there was nothing in the perfectly bare room with which to make a light, that there was nothing with which to force the solid wooden shutter of its one window, and that there was no possibility

of bursting through the massive wooden door which had been recently fitted with three new locks.

Upon these, guided only by his sense of touch Kleath set doggedly to work. A small file, a pocket knife and some hairpins were the only tools at his command.

Goldie sat on the floor beside him. She fretted a little about her father's state of mind when he missed her, she speculated a little upon his probable treatment of Duke, when he knew . . . she worried because there was nothing with which to bathe Kleath's head and she protested that she was quite calm and comfortable. Certainly, she must have been exhausted by physical and emotional stress, for presently, she slept.

The Alaskan night wore slowly on. In the deserted road house there was silence save for the rasp of scraping steel and the sound of a man's heavy breathing.

For a time Kleath felt like a person on a treadmill. His mind moved constantly without getting anywhere. Granted that Duke's motive was revenge — why? The question was as unanswerable as it was on the first night of their meeting in the "Hall." And how would this act — this infamous act for which he would undeniably be held responsible

ble — satisfy his craving for revenge? Merely by causing Kleath to suffer through a knowledge of Goldie's humiliation? And how did he think he could turn the floods of Tim Meadows's wrath from himself upon an innocent man whom he would accuse of betraying his confidence and his daughter?

No answer presented itself, but the vital thing to Kleath was Duke's success in placing Goldie Meadows in a false position before the world, a position from which he was powerless to extricate her.

A sudden thought flashed into his mind. Was that, after all, Duke's deliberate intention . . . to place her in a false position from which he was powerless to extricate her? It was! He saw it clearly now. A recollection of the night Meredith had helped the drunken foreman home rose vividly to Kleath's mind. It was then that Duke had made a definite boast of holding a card up his sleeve; it was then he had made a definite threat to play it at the proper time. Obviously, the time had come! The diabolical subtlety of the plot was staggering. He had attempted nothing resembling robbery; no violence to Goldie. He had simply locked them in the deserted road house and said he was sending them to Paradise. . . .

"Into Hell," muttered Kleath as he filed.

For he knew the code of the Yukon well, the Yukon where Love and Life are cheap but where the name of a good woman is held dearer than the gold out in the creeks. Whatever punishment was meted out to Duke for his criminal act, Kleath knew that he would be expected to marry Goldie. Tim Meadows would kill him if he did not marry Goldie . . . Tim Meadows would kill him if he did! And in either case the girl would be the innocent sufferer; her fair name would wear a smudge across it, for although all Dawson might forgive and exonerate them, none of Dawson would believe their innocence.

The men of the Yukon were not models of restraint, especially when there were "extenuating circumstances" to purge their acts of depravity and vice.

He might go away. He might stay and allow Tim Meadows to kill him, but how would Goldie benefit? Not at all! She would be pointed at, sneered at, pitied!

The idea was a triumph of devilish cunning, and worthy of a more refined brain than that of Joe Duke.

But, Kleath argued desperately, need all Dawson know? To be sure these were not the days of

silence and suppression. A man stood up before witnesses and called his companion a liar, cheat or coward. He accused him openly of treachery in his home and the crowd sat in immediate judgment on the case. That would be Tim Meadows's way. And even if Tim, having heard his story, could be won to a policy of silence, was it probable that Duke would allow the affair to rest without some sensational public accusation? Hardly!

Over and over the situation he went until he became bewildered and his thoughts meant nothing. Several times he caught himself repeating, "*What* can be done about Goldie? What *can* be done about Goldie?" But his fingers made progress if his mind did not. Bit by bit the locks gave way, and as the flush of sunrise spread like a pink fan across the sky, he flung back the heavy door and stepped into the dewy hush of a radiant spring morning.

For a moment Kleath felt as though he had shaken off the effects of some monstrous nightmare; the events of the last few hours seemed absurdly unreal. He could not associate them with his future. The intensity of his stress was almost forgotten as he refreshed himself, cleansed himself, bathed himself in the purity of that early morning.

Then Goldie called from the doorway behind him

and the reality of it all struck him sharply once more.

She looked more beautiful than he had ever seen her. Her shimmering golden hair was slightly tossed and strands of it caught gleams of light and seemed to warm them. Her fair young face was too young to retain marks of emotion; it was anything but haggard. Her cheeks were softly flushed, her lips were full and rosy. Only her eyes, shining like stars under deep blue water, looked heavy as a small child's might have done.

She advanced in an unrestrained, unembarrassed sort of way. She came quite close and Kleath got the impression that she expected him to kiss her. He snapped his teeth together, and clenched his hands behind him. He looked away from her at the top of a distant tree, and he assumed his harshest manner.

"Shall we go home, now, Chris?" she asked.

"You must go," he said. "You must go at once, and alone. I hate to think of your walking, but there seems no help for it. Avoid people as much as possible . . . it is best. There is a chance that your father has not been home, and that we have not been missed . . . that no one knows. We must not be seen together. I will follow you sometime

during the morning. And, Goldie . . ." he pressed his nails into the flesh until they drew blood . . . "Goldie, make me a promise that you will tell no one! You can't understand . . . don't try . . . just promise me! I will swear that no one shall hear of this night from me."

He made an oath awful in its solemnity, and she stood motionless staring at him with wide-open, incredulous eyes. Then she quivered as though he had struck her. Was this the Christopher Kleath she knew — this man who deliberately avoided saying the words she expected to hear, the words she had a right to hear? He knew the Yukon way. He must know that she *wanted* him to tell, to bring Joe Duke and his confederate to justice, then to "do what was fair by her" and clear scandal's slate of its marks against her name.

Her dreams turned to ashes. Her ideals tumbled in ruins about her. The man she loved stood stripped of the nobility with which she had invested him, a miserable worm, a coward. He was afraid of Joe Duke; he preferred shielding himself behind a woman's secrecy to a good, clean fight in the open. Moreover — she drew her breath sharply between her teeth, and raised her chin as though to meet the fact bravely, unflinchingly — his cowardice was of

the meanest kind, that which would take an insult from a man and offer one to a woman. Was he not offering her the most deadly insult possible? Was he not offering her secrecy instead of his name as a cover for the unjust but inevitable accusation the world would make, when it knew?

Scalding tears of outraged pride blinded her as she turned from him without speaking.

Kleath knew her simple ethics well. He saw too clearly the hurt he was inflicting and each word was like the lash of a whip from his hand upon her body. All the pain he had ever suffered faded into insignificance compared to these moments of supreme torture. He watched her until a bend in the road hid her from his sight, then with a strangled cry, he seized a large rock in his two hands and hurled it with all his strength against the boarded window of his "Paradise."

Goldie covered the ground rapidly. She had no particular wish to hurry back to Dawson; she did not care where her steps led. She just blindly followed the road. Hurt and humiliated beyond the telling, her mind was possessed of but one idea — Kleath did not love her. Worse, he did not even respect her. He probably classed her with the lowest of her father's rustlers.

She cast about for some specific act on his part which was definitely committing, upon which she had cause to base her presumption that he loved her. She found, however, that she had nothing more than intuition to argue that he wished to speak the words she longed to hear. Yet, intuition was very strong. There was the night by the river and his confessed consciousness of "the coming of spring." There was the look on his face when she flung the burning lamp into the snow and turned towards him. There was the night they discussed Tess, when he took her in his arms as though he would never let her go. And there was the occasion just past when he threw himself at Duke as though he would tear him into bits. Besides, in the road house, he had undoubtedly meant to kiss her. . . .

Yet, the humiliation and hurt became almost intolerable — the thought of marrying her must fill him with aversion so great that he could not compass that sacrifice even to save her good name. Rather than be forced into such a marriage, he would stoop to cowardice, enjoining her to secrecy and swearing to secrecy himself.

Any man she had ever known would have offered his name to a woman under like circumstances. Over and over it had been done; women undeserving

of consideration, while she — Goldie laughed bitterly remembering that before she slept she had pictured Kleath as welcoming this opportunity which would make it easy for him to speak of his love for her . . . she remembered reading into his roughness, a delicacy and chivalry which forbade his forcing the ignominy of her position upon her then, a restraint which would be lifted as soon as she was free.

Blind, egotistical little fool! Her laughter petered out into a sob. His attentions, such as they were, all during the winter, had held in them nothing but caution. He did not wish to commit himself. She saw it now. His roughness and restraint cloaked nothing but a monstrous indifference, perhaps a fear that he would be forced into a state which was utterly repellant to him. His every look and word and act took on a different meaning, one which filled Goldie with intolerable shame.

Bruised in soul, her thoughts turned to her father, but instead of taking comfort from them, she found cause for deeper humiliation. He had mistaken Kleath's attitude, too. He had given him the freedom of the cabin and the "Hall"; he had thrown the care of her upon him; he had taken it for granted that she would be an acceptable responsibility!

Could she bear to know that he, who had always regarded her as one of Life's rarely perfect creations, would look at her now as one deficient in some attribute she should have possessed — that though in his eyes would shine infinite pity and love, in them too, would lurk a galling speculation as to the reason she had been unable to win the man she desired?

Vanity, pride — deeply-wounded pride — urged her not to tell. It was, as Kleath had said, possible that she had not been missed. If fate abetted her so far, she decided to do as he wished. She would seal her lips forever, she would bear her insult bravely, and allow two guilty men to go free.

Panting, she almost ran into Dawson, quiet at this hour, for the night revellers had just gone to bed and the day revellers had not yet risen. She met no one.

Letting herself cautiously into the cabin, she gave a sob of relief. It was empty. She caught up a hat and rushed out into the street again. There, she came face to face with a woman so haggard and pale that the recollection of Conrad Haynes flashed into her mind, and she shuddered. The stranger looked at her with eyes which burned with hatred and malice and a sort of grim triumph. Goldie's heart beat fast with fright and she ran toward the "San Do-

mingo " wondering what the woman's manner meant.

Tisdale was gathering up the night's receipts and preparing to go to rest. Several men behind the bar were clearing out the debris. On chairs, tables and the floor lay others in various stages of drunkenness. The sweepers looked up in astonishment as she entered and picked her way to the little room at the back.

"He's all right," called Tisdale as she passed. "Sleepin' like a baby."

She nodded and went on. The circumstance was not unusual. Tim Meadows frequently, during clean-up, dropped in his tracks at the "San Domingo" and lay among the drunken revellers, sleeping as soundly as the most drunken of them.

Goldie opened the door. Her heart thumped suffocatingly. Had she been missed? What would her father say? What excuse could she offer?

She stopped abruptly on the threshold. There, in the room from which she had been recently kidnapped, lay her father swathed in bandages and tended by "Diamond Tooth" Lizzie.

"Olie Oleson done it," she said, succinctly, pointing to the sleeping man. "Mistook him fer Jud Cheney an' walloped him a good one with a bottle.

Gawd, I never seen so much blood! Ran like the gutters in a stockyard. Everybody fightin' . . . even Bill got his. Tim, he ain't unconscious, now. . . . I mean he's sleepin' off some dope. 'Doc' give him a dozen knockout drops the minit he come to. It would 'a taken a couple of the Pyramids to 'a held him down, he was that mad! Had to keep him still, ye see. We would 'a tol' you," Lizzie went on, "only when we had time to think, we seen there wasn't any light in the cabin an' everybody said it wuz a sin to wake you."

She yawned cavernously, felt her diamond with the tip of her tongue and rose.

"What yer got them glad rags on fer this time in the morning?"

Goldie looked at her light dress and started. She had not thought to change.

"I don't know . . ." she stammered. "I just put on the first thing I could see. . . ."

"Humph," commented Lizzie, stretching herself. "Ain't worry a funny thing? Now, many's the time, Tim's jes' nachelly slept over here till breakfast an' you snored right along over yonder, without a quiver, didn't ye? But along comes an accident — here he is with his pore brains oozin' out, — an' up you wakes with a hunch that sumpting's

wrong, slings on yer evenin' clothes, and hustles over! That's worry. . . . Gosh, but it's funny!"

Goldie bent over her father as she felt the blood mount into her face. "Yes," she murmured, "it certainly is."

"Well," said Lizzie, "now that you're here, you might as well stay, whilst I trot off an' pound my ear. Seems as if I could make ole what-ye-ma-call-'em Winkle look as if he had a bad case of insomnia, if I ever onct got started. I'll come back an' take on another shift, purty soon though, an' Bill said he'd look in. Oh, yes, an' 'Doc's' comin' along early, too, so you'll be all right."

It was after noon when Kleath returned to Dawson. He had triumphed over the temptation to trail his banner of loyalty in the dust; he had steeled himself to the insidious thought that were he to do so, the world would justify him. Resolved rather, "to his own self to be true," he deliberately relinquished the easy course and accepted the difficult one, realizing that in following an ideal, he must suffer unmitigated punishment by including the woman he loved in his sacrifice and offering her up upon the altar of his loyalty — to another.

Knots of people were gathered on the street. A

sense of the unusual permeated the atmosphere. Conversation ceased as he approached and whispering followed him.

He thought they knew.

Involuntarily, his steps led him to the plant. For the first time in hours, he thought of the paper. As he neared the door, Weatherby rushed out, and with him several other men, including Sergeant Cottingham.

"Oh, here he is!" cried the former, as though with relief. "We have been looking for you, Kleath. Where have you been?"

"What is it to you?"

A murmur ran through the group which had collected.

"Never mind, just now. Tell me where you have been since yesterday."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I expect to account in dollars and cents for the time away from the plant, but that is all the accounting I propose to make." He turned away.

"Then I arrest you in the name of Her Majesty the Queen and warn you that every word you say may be used as evidence against you." The Sergeant stepped forward and laid his hand on Kleath's shoulder. Again the crowd murmured.

Kleath stared.

"Arrest me? What for?"

"Pickin' the safe and robbin' the bank of two hundred thousand odd dollars."

There was a tense silence for a moment, then several voices cried simultaneously,

"Prove an alibi, Chris!"

"Where was you, Old Boy? We know you didn't pull this thing off?"

"Speak out, Kleath — we're all friends — tell 'em where you've been whilst you've got the chance."

Weatherby added his voice to the general plea. His interest was far from professional.

But Kleath was silent.

On him were found a penknife, a file and several queerly-twisted pieces of wire. Their use he would not explain, but he looked his accusers in the face without flinching.

"I am innocent," he said. No more.

So they took him away and locked him in a cell. It was the one vacated on the day previous by Delany who had left for less commodious quarters in the penitentiary at New Westminster.

Kleath dropped on the one chair the room contained and covered his face with his hands. He felt

as though he sat amid the wreckage of several human lives.

Duke's scheme unfolded itself before him like a scroll. He saw with what amazing thoroughness he had played into the man's hand. There was the opening of Mrs. Wade's door, there was the picking of Tim Meadows's safe at Extravaganza — black evidence against him. He understood now why he and Goldie had been so carelessly bound, why the locks had yielded so easily to his persuasive files and wires. Duke's plot would have failed, had they not effected their own release. A vastly different construction would have been put upon the affair, had they been found locked in the deserted road house.

Nothing now remained but for Kleath to compromise a girl he could not marry by proving an alibi, or confess a crime he had not committed and serve a term in the penitentiary. Upon the chivalry which would prompt a following of the latter course, Duke had relied.

CHAPTER XVI

Into the court room crowded every able-bodied resident of Dawson and its environs. By ten o'clock the people were packed in so dense a mass that, when Maria de Cordova tried to faint, she found it impossible to fall down and had to content herself with an attack of hysterics — largely induced by alcoholic intemperance. By ten o'clock, too, Sergeant Cottingham refused further admission to the court room, and turned an indifferent ear to the grumbling of those who wedged themselves around the door or oozed discontentedly over on to the stairs.

Dawson disposed of its legal obligations in a large square room which was divided into two parts by a perennially-sticky wooden rail. On one side of this sat the court and its dependents; on the other stood the populace — legal hospitality being the only kind which was overlooked in that open-handed, generous, new-settled country. The positions of preference for the people, therefore, were those at the rail upon

which tired bodies might droop, or those near the wall against which they might sag. A few persons could make a pretense of sitting upon the two window sills where they could hear little and see less.

Promptly as the hour struck, a creaking door behind the dais, which was raised above the clamor of the court, announced his Lordship's coming. The Crier called for order, those lawyers fortunate enough to be sitting down, stood up, and Judge Clayson in his somber robes appeared. Had they been white instead of black, he would have looked astonishingly like Julius Cæsar

He was a stern man and a just one. From him the criminal need expect no leniency; with him instructing the jury the innocent might confidently look for their acquittal. Seldom, if ever, had justice miscarried while he presided.

His eyes, small, keen and of a palish blue, had a way of turning upon the dock with the searching directness of a powerful headlight, and many a prisoner, disconcerted to the limit of confession, declared that the Judge's eyes convicted him — not the jury.

Upon the perfectly bald head of Abner McCowan, the Clerk of the Court, Judge Clayson might have peered down had he felt so inclined. McCowan, to quote Bill Buck, "looked like a sardine in ill

health," but dipping into natural history for a parallel, his resemblance to a large gray rat would be rather more exact. Although his head was innocent of hair, his ears were large and furry as though they had been cut from a mullen leaf, and, when not fussing amongst his innumerable papers, he had a habit of stroking them with a sort of passionate care. His voice, superlatively nasal, seemed to have travelled not only the length of his very long nose, but through a succession of metal tubes as well, and, when raised in excitement or anger, it ended in a harsh little squeak. One invariably received the impression that he was disappointed at an acquittal; pleased at a conviction. It was as though he said,

"Aha! . . . another one of 'em out of my way . . . let us diligently strive to exterminate the rest . . . hanging is too good for 'em . . . the scoundrels . . . too good. . . ."

His Lordship gathered his robes about him, looked inscrutably over the sea of faces and said,

"Call the first case."

McCowan immediately cried,

"Thic — ween — versus Kleath!"

A murmur ran through the crowd, a murmur which might be oddly described as a loud *hush*, and every eye turned to the cage-like structure, which

directly faced the Court. In the tense silence which ensued, there came from below, the hollow sound of footsteps — muffled at first, but momentarily growing more distinct and louder.

An instant of breathless suspense, then, from a trap in the floor, Kleath mounted between two warders, to whom his wrists were shackled.

The perpendicular iron bars of the cage, which extended to a height much greater than the railing of an ordinary dock, threw, in the strong sunlight, heavy shadows over him, shadows in stripes, which, to the superstitious and imaginative, seemed grimly prophetic. He looked neither to the right nor the left. For an instant his eye met that of the Judge, then, shifting his position, he stared indifferently out of the far window.

To some members of that curious, interested, sympathetic, sensation-loving crowd, he was a distinct disappointment. Two days in jail had not altered his appearance greatly. His manner lacked the buoyant sanguineness of the innocent, it lacked the defiant confidence of the man who would impress the jury and "brazen it out," it also lacked the dull despair, the remorse, the cowed hopelessness of the guilty. What it did contain might be described as a supreme indifference — a callousness — a deter-

mination to be affected by nothing which might be said or done.

McCowan balanced a ludicrously small pair of steel-rimmed glasses on the very end of his nose, and read the indictment.

Kleath was charged with unlawfully breaking into and entering the premises of the Bank of British North America with intent to commit an indictable offense; being armed against the peace of "our Sovereign Lady the Queen"; with committing a felonious assault upon one Edward Farnum, teller of said bank; with stealing and carrying away the funds of said bank to the sum of one hundred thousand dollars in currency, and one hundred and fifty ounces of dust.

McCowan raised his head and asked,

"What say you — guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," Kleath answered.

The room rang with cheers above the noise of which the Crier's voice could be heard shouting for order. As the tumult subsided, Judge Clayson leaned forward and, tapping his desk, said severely,

"If there is any further demonstration of this kind, I shall order the room to be cleared. Is the prisoner represented by counsel?"

McCowan again raised his head from an envelop-

ing pile of papers, turned his long nose in the direction of the dock, and sniffed inquiringly. Kleath, as though conscious of this look without actually seeing it, replied,

"I have none."

"Then I shall appoint counsel for your defense," said His Lordship, in a tone which sounded as though he were administering a reproof.

His glance traveled along the row of lawyers seated opposite him. Had he been a master searching out a culprit, it could not have been more stern. Several of the profession squirmed under the cold severity of that eye, and more than one man wondered whether its extreme harshness of expression cloaked sympathy for a hitherto upright citizen, whether it covered a conviction of Kleath's innocence, which could not be made apparent, or whether it denoted a frankly condemnatory attitude toward the guilty.

Presently, His Lordship's eye rested upon a fair youth whose appearance argued twenty-one years' avoidance of the seamy side of life, but whose birth registry would have testified to five more.

"Mr. Loomis," said the Judge, "I appoint you to defend the prisoner."

Loomis started guiltily to his feet. He had the

idiotic sensation of having done something wrong. The room swam round him in a hot blur. This was his first case and his wits slowly left him.

"Yes, My Lord," he heard a weak voice answer. "If Your Lordship pleases — certainly."

He felt the eyes of his colleagues lashing him with contempt; he felt from the Judge that insolent pity of the strong for the weak; he felt the glances of the populace gruelling into his back. There was an awful roaring in his ears even though he knew no one was speaking. He knew he was going to make a hopeless fool of himself, and wondered why he had ever studied law.

Finally, he picked Kleath's face out of the swimming mist and started across the room to the dock. He tried to walk naturally — nonchalantly, indeed — was conscious that his boots creaked and that some one tittered; he tip-toed, stumbled over his own foot and ended by dashing himself against the railing of the dock. A great laugh rolled over him like a wave. He seemed to be drowning in it.

He never knew what he asked Kleath, or what Kleath replied. There remained with him only the consciousness of a rebuff in the prisoner's manner, as though waving his counsel aside as too trifling a personage to merit his attention. Kleath looked

fixedly out of the window without turning his head in Loomis's direction.

In the meantime, McCowan had drawn a large wooden box toward him and was preparing to select therefrom the names of those summoned to serve on the jury. This body, unlike everything else in those highly-colored, extravagant times, was a meager gathering, numbering but six men instead of twelve. In the days when the Northwest Territories were sparsely settled, the securing of six white men, British subjects and ones who were competent to serve, presented sufficiently grave difficulties. A jury composed of twelve men would have been, for the most part, quite out of the question.

The defense challenging none of the names called, Hargis, the Crown Prosecutor, a small, yellowish man, addressed the jury. After stating the facts as given by McCowan in his indictment, Hargis continued, smoothly,

"That there is, gentlemen, no doubt as to the identity of the criminal, will be amply proven to you, this morning. In addition to the weight of evidence which concerns his past achievements in a mechanical way, we are prepared to show you that he carried upon his person at the time of his arrest the tools of his profession — I might add, gentlemen, tools

which gave irrefutable testimony of having been recently used! No doubt my learned friend, whose reputation for astute advocacy is so well founded, will endeavor to prove a temporary aberration or to establish an alibi. But we have foreseen both these contingencies, gentlemen, and can prove to you beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the dastardly crime committed in our midst on Wednesday last, was the work of the prisoner at the bar. I shall not detain you longer with the sordid details of the case, but will proceed to call the first witness."

Eddie Farnum, whose face was almost completely concealed behind bandages, took the stand and was administered the oath. The attention of the crowd was divided between Kleath and this first witness. The former, after one brief glance toward the box, turned once more to the contemplation of a square patch of blue beyond the cobweb-covered window pane. The latter, after including the entire room in a resentful glare, fixed his eye upon the prisoner and spoke to him directly in a tone of acrid bitterness.

"We had closed at midnight, after one of the heaviest days in the bank's history," he said, "and I was going over my books pending the arrival of the junior who was due to go on duty at three o'clock.

I had not been working very long, when I was distracted by a noise — it was more than a noise, too, a feeling, as when your hair stands on end. I could neither locate the noise nor account for the feeling and was too busy to waste time trying, so I went back to work. Then I distinctly heard a cough — it seemed to come from the street, just outside the window. I got down from my stool to investigate, had my hand on the door of my cage when some one struck me a terrific blow from behind and I knew no more until I opened my eyes to see the doctor and several men bending over me.”

He felt his head carefully.

“How do you account for the blow, Mr. Farnum?”

“I can account for it only in one way — Some one was concealed in my cage and, when I turned to locate the cough, he got up and struck me.”

“Would it have been possible for some one to conceal himself from you?”

“Considering the rush, sir, and the numbers of people in the bank, also considering the necessity for my leaving the cage frequently to go to the vault; it would have been possible, although so dangerous a trick that one would be inclined to call it impossible, if it had not happened. There were piles of bags of

dust on the floor beneath my desk, and I suppose a man could have hidden behind them."

"I think that point is clear, Mr. Farnum," remarked Hargis. "Now as to the vault — had you locked it before you were attacked?"

"Yes. I locked it after depositing the last currency, and would have opened it to deposit the dust after I had checked it up."

"Who else had the combination?"

"The manager."

"Thank you, Mr. Farnum. I think that is all." He turned with elaborate politeness to Loomis, and asked, "Does the counsel for the defense wish to cross-examine this witness?"

Red and white by turns, Loomis got to his feet.

"— Er —" he stammered, feeling that he was expected to ask something and not knowing what — "er — was there any one else in the bank with you — at the time — you were struck?"

Farnum openly sneered at the question.

"There wasn't *supposed* to be," he answered. "One man is always on duty in the bank and a mounted policeman is always on duty outside."

"Yet the policeman outside seems to have been ignorant that this assault was being committed," said

Loomis, "in spite of the fact that your cage is plainly visible from the window and that the bank is always well lighted."

The rustle of applause which followed this point went to Loomis's head like wine. He felt dizzy and a little sick.

"I humbly submit, my lord," murmured Hargis, suavely, "that these matters will be made clear by the next witness."

The Judge made a curt motion of his head, and Hargis called Sergeant Cottingham.

The Sergeant went on duty at nine o'clock on the night of Wednesday, March eighteenth. He walked up and down before the bank, as was his custom, until almost two. Until that time he had noticed nothing of an unusual nature either inside or out. But shortly before two o'clock, on looking through the window, he saw that the teller's stool was empty. He waited a moment, but as Farnum did not appear, Sergeant Cottingham entered the premises and discovered the crime which had been committed.

"Inside the cage he was, sir," he said, "lying on his face in a pool of blood. The place was perfectly orderly, sir, and when I took a peep at the vault, I was encouraged by finding the door shut and no ap-

pearance of robbery. For a minute, I thought maybe Mr. Farnum had met with some accident, himself."

"Could a blow have been struck while you were walking from one window to the other?" asked the Crown Prosecutor.

"Certainly," answered the policeman. "That's the only way it could have happened without my seeing it."

Loomis jumped to his feet.

"How could a man hiding under the desk know when you had passed the window?" he asked.

His Lordship was about to caution the young counsel not to interrupt but to wait for cross-examination, when Hargis spoke.

"My learned friend's question is an interesting one," he observed. "It is worthy of a head much grayer than his. . . . The man under the desk could only have known when the Sergeant had passed by a warning to that effect, a cough, let us say — from an accomplice."

There was a flutter throughout the room. Even Kleath turned his head in the direction of the stand, and, although he looked immediately away, it was evident that his attention was keener than before. The flutter was succeeded by a soft buzzing. So

Kleath had an accomplice! whispered Dawson. Who could it be — a man? Was there, perhaps, a woman concerned in the case, as well? Was the prisoner but the tool instead of the designing principal in this daring crime? Would Loomis have sufficient sense to drag the name of the coward who was shielding himself — or herself — behind a chivalrous man, from obscurity? Would Kleath merit an acquittal?

The crowd, which during McCowan's indictment had assumed a rather critical attitude, which during Hargis's address and Farnum's testimony, had been in some portions of the room, distinctly unfriendly, suddenly warmed to the prisoner. The mass of people came to the conclusion, reached long since by both Weatherby and Meredith, Lizzie and Buck, that Kleath was bearing the brunt of another's guilt. But whose? People looked with covert suspicion at one another.

Hargis turned to the witness and spoke on,

"How do you account, Sergeant, for the fact that during the time between half-past twelve, or thereabout, when the blow was delivered, and two o'clock, you failed to miss the teller from his desk?"

Every one strained forward to catch Cottingham's reply.

"Well, sir, it must have been like this — the fellow who struck the blow must have been uncommonly like Mr. Farnum, on the top of the head at least. Maybe he was even picked with that likeness in view. I think, sir, that after he hit the teller, sir, he mounted to the stool himself, bent his head over the books and sat there quiet, while his partner did the work."

There was a soft scraping of elbow against elbow as the dense mass of people turned about to scrutinize one another. It amazed them to discover the number of men who had sandy-colored hair, and they felt cheated at being given a clue which apparently led nowhere.

"Exactly," Hargis returned. "The only logical deduction. After which the two of them made their get-away through the Assay Office at the rear, and thence through Martin Boyd's saloon to the street."

With something like triumph in his manner, Loomis rose to cross-examine. He felt he was about to score a point.

"You stated, Sergeant, that in your opinion a person who resembled Mr. Farnum delivered the blow and took the teller's place?"

"I did."

"In which case, you would not accuse the prisoner of striking the blow?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Then," cried the young man, excitedly, "how can he be accused of assaulting a man when evidence has established the fact that he did not do it?"

The room cheered under its breath; so to speak. Even the jury was impressed. Loomis felt himself floating as though on a cloud. But his Lordship administered a metaphorical slap in the face, and brought things back to their coldly normal level.

"You choose to quibble, Mr. Loomis," he said with severity. "The prisoner at the bar, shown to have abetted the assault and failing to establish the identity of the actual offender, stands accused. Proceed with the evidence."

Tisdale was the next witness, a most unwilling one. His testimony established Kleath's unusual ability in the manipulation of intricate mechanism, as in the opening of Tim Meadows's safe at Extravaganza. Under Hargis's persistent questioning, he also admitted the remarkable achievement of picking the lock at Mrs. Wade's cabin.

There was no cross-examination by the defense, and Sam Duford, taking the stand, testified that Kleath had not slept in the hotel on the night of Wednesday, the eighteenth. Several witnesses from

the "San Domingo" gave evidence proving that Kleath had been seen in the "Hall" during the early part of the evening, but no one had seen him after midnight.

The toils seemed to be drawing closer about him. The temper of the crowd after listening to a continuance of derogatory evidence veered again and became almost antagonistic in some quarters.

"Why don't he talk?" whispered Lizzie, passionately. "You'd think he was wooden . . . sittin' there an' gazin' at the sky! Say, Bill, I ain't never been mistaken in a man yet, an' I know as sure as I'm standin' here, that Chris Kleath didn't pull off this job no more'n you did. Why, in God's name, don't he tell *where* he was?"

Receiving no enlightenment from Buck, she fell to polishing her tooth with unconscious vigor, her mind busy in its search for the criminal Kleath must be shielding.

Hargis drew a deep breath and stood up.

"That, my Lord," said he, "is the case for the Crown."

The attention of the room was again centered upon the dock. Loomis squeaked across the floor and consulted with his client, evidently trying to persuade him to take the stand in his own defense.

With unmistakable finality Kleath shook his head. Loomis returned to his place before the Court.

"There is no witness for the defense, my Lord," he announced, irritably.

Kleath's friends groaned. His most intimate associates, with a few exceptions, were ranged along the sticky rail — Weatherby, Meredith, Sanderson, the manager of the bank, Inglis, several boys from the plant, Olie Oleson, Buck, Lizzie and Goldie Meadows, who had been dragged from her father's bedside at the noisy insistence of the last.

Goldie's face was drawn and very white, but her pallor was considered by those who noted it as but the natural result of recent anxious hours and the strain of nursing.

Intermittently, throughout the trial she uttered distressed little sounds contradictory to the evidence. "Oh, no . . . no, no . . ." she would say. And Lizzie, who did not dream of her struggle in choking back the impulse to cry out Kleath's innocence before them all, nudged her frequently, and hissed out of the corner of her mouth a warning for silence.

Had Lizzie glanced at Goldie, she could not have failed to discover the terrible ordeal the girl was passing through, and it would not have taken long for that keen student of human nature to guess very

near the truth. But Lizzie was otherwise engrossed. Her fine black eyes roved from the Judge's inscrutable countenance to Kleath's immovable profile and then to the witness who happened to be in the box. She forgot about Goldie until, at Loomis's announcement, the girl moaned, swayed and fell against her.

"Poor kid," she murmured. "Keep a stiff upper lip. It ain't all over yet."

It appeared, however, as though she were mistaken, for, at this moment, the Judge looked toward Hargis, who arose.

"Gentlemen," he said, and McCowan commenced to stroke his ear with great care, "it is not necessary for me to consume much of your time in reviewing this case. We have shown you conclusively that a cold-blooded and premeditated crime has been committed, a crime, gentlemen, which by common consent is acknowledged to be the most dastardly — with the exception of murder — in a frontier community. I mean, gentlemen, that of robbery with violence.

"You have heard the testimony of the witnesses, testimony which I am bound to admit was wrung from the majority of them unwillingly — so strong a hold had this supposed upright citizen upon a

warm-hearted, generous-minded public; a man of resource, gentlemen, of education and pleasing address, not to mention his undeniable superior mechanical skill, misguided though it was; the most dangerous kind of a criminal, gentlemen, I need scarcely point out.

"You have heard the able way in which he has been defended by my brilliant young friend; you will grant that every possible argument has been brought forward in his favor. But do not overlook, gentlemen, the very significant fact that even my learned young friend was unable to produce any witnesses for the defense. The prisoner himself dared not take the stand, although such caution — let us call it — was obviously against the best advice of his worthy counsel. I leave the case with you, gentlemen of the jury, confident in the belief that at the hands of a fair-minded and impartial jury, the highest justice will be done between the Crown and the prisoner at the bar."

"Gosh," breathed Buck, "I wisht I'd studied this law game. Seems as if it ain't what a man really does or don't do that matters, it's havin' a lawyer with some brains. Hargis could make out a case agin a new-born baby, an' innocence wouldn't play no bigger part than a pair of sixes agin a flush. It's

a smart argufyer that Chris wants. Say, Mr. Weatherby, ain't there nuthin' we can do?"

Weatherby shrugged his shoulders, hopelessly, and jerked his head in the direction of Loomis who got slowly to his feet.

"Only a miracle will save Kleath, now," he whispered.

The defense was feeble and halting but not without convincing points and ones which had the power to sway the crowd from animosity back to sympathy once more. The evidence, maintained Loomis, was entirely circumstantial. No one had actually seen Kleath enter the bank or leave it. No money had been found upon his person at the time of his arrest and none in his rooms. His past record had been above reproach. It would be unlike so capable and clear-reasoning a body of men, he suggested, to convict a man on purely circumstantial evidence, merely because he refused to enlighten them upon one point — merely because he refused to tell them where he was while the robbery was taking place.

He closed rather dramatically in these words. . . .

"Gentlemen, who can say that the prisoner, whose defense has been entrusted to my inexperienced advocacy, is positively guilty? Who would maintain that his refusal to prove an alibi is indisputable evi-

dence of guilt? Look at the prisoner, gentlemen! Is he the type of man who abuses the trust placed in him or is he, rather, a man of chivalrous instincts and quixotic principles who takes the burden of a crime which he has not committed upon his own shoulders, instead of allowing a weaker person to suffer? I beg, gentlemen, that you give these points due consideration before making your just decision."

The whole assembly was visibly impressed. People wagged their heads at one another in a way which plainly said,

"We were convinced of his innocence all along. We only hoped that he would reveal the identity of the guilty person. Let him off, poor boy. We are not looking for *his* blood."

To offset the influence of Loomis's plea, his Lordship's charge was unusually harsh and stern. Unlike McCowan he did not wish to see a man convicted, but he realized how easily justice might be perverted; how prone the frontier jury is to disregard the weight of evidence against a prisoner, and to acquit him by reason of personal friendship combined with a dramatic defense.

So in the minds of the fickle, unstable crowd, the effect of Loomis's words was speedily obliterated.

The jury did not even leave the room. They prepared to take a quick ballot where they were.

The stillness became oppressive. Men within the rail who had seats leaned forward, with eyes fastened upon the foreman. The populace stretched out their necks and crooked horny hands behind their ears, waiting. . . . Humanity's heavy odor pulsed over all.

The foreman of the jury rose. He signalled to McCowan and prepared to render his verdict. It was during that moment of tensity Maria de Cordova had hysterics.

"Have — you — reached a verdict, gentlemen?" squeaked McCowan, unable to keep the excitement out of his voice.

"We have."

"What is your verdict?"

"*Guilty!*"

Again that crushing stillness, then, a woman's sharp cry split the silence like the report of a gun.

"Fools," she shrieked, "you are condemning an innocent man!"

CHAPTER XVII

Instantly the room was in an uproar.

Goldie's choked protest, which followed the verdict of the jury, was drowned in the tumult and confusion.

"No, no! He is not guilty! Let me speak!" she cried, frantically, but even Lizzie, standing at her side, had not caught the words. Lizzie was absorbed in her effort to assure the crowd that she had bet her bottom dollar on Kleath's innocence all along, and in making this fact known above the general din.

Grimes, the Crier, beat his gavel on the desk and made yapping grimaces with his huge mouth. No one knew he was calling the court to order. No one cared. Most of the lawyers jumped to their feet and turned toward the door. McCowan stopped stroking his ear, opened his mouth to its capacity and breathed loudly, like a man snoring. His Lordship leaned far over his desk and searched the throng of wildly excited people for the speaker.

Kleath, for a moment forgotten, leaped up be-

tween the two warders and gazed down upon the frenzied scene with horror written plainly upon his blanched face.

Duke slipped his hand into the pocket of his coat and wriggled toward the open window. Haynes, his back against the wall, glared about him with burning eyes, like an animal at bay.

Then, above the clamor, Hargis made himself heard.

"My Lord," he shouted, "I would ask that sentence be passed upon the prisoner. It is impossible to admit any evidence at this juncture of the proceedings. I would ask that the intoxicated person be removed from the Court."

A growl of disapproval arose from hundreds of throats, but this changed into an expression of approbation when the Judge overruled Hargis's application and signalled the woman to approach.

She slouched forward, smeared loose-hanging lips across the cover of The Book, which in that room was never opened and never read, and took the stand.

With a start, Goldie recognized her as the same woman she had encountered the morning after her imprisonment in the road house, the one whose inexplicable look of hatred had so frightened her.

The witness did not look at Kleath; she turned

her back upon the Court and stood silent a moment, sweeping the sea of upturned faces with a glance from which two men quailed.

Any pretensions she may have had to beauty had long since disappeared. Her big-boned frame, which could have been pleasing only when adequately rounded, was almost repulsive in its emaciation. Her clothes, soiled and cheap in cut and texture, disguised none of her physical imperfections. Her hair, thin, gray, unkempt, fell like a ragged veil about her face. The vivacity, the sparkle which in times past might have made her eyes — her whole expression — charming, was superseded by a sort of nervous alertness such as one sees in trick animals who have known a brutal trainer. She was sallow, she was heavily creased by the finger of Time. She was unwashed.

“My name is Nell Kleath,” she said, huskily. “I am Chris Kleath’s wife.”

“What’s that?” asked the Judge, bending forward.

“I am Chris Kleath’s wife,” repeated the woman, “and just out of the ‘Pen’ six months before my time — for good conduct.”

She paused and looked defiantly toward the spot where Duke stood.

"I was known in 'the profession' as 'Sesame Nell' . . . my business was safe picking. Three of us worked in a team — Cully Conrad, Joe Leroy, sometimes called the Duke, and myself. Cully and I did the dirty work. Cully used lead pipe when it was necessary and I worked at the combinations. Joe distributed the long green. He always got away with it without a hint of suspicion.

"I met Chris in Chicago. I had a job in a safe factory there, and he was sent on from New York as superintendent of the works. Only a kid he was too, but he knew the business from start to finish. I saw he took a fancy to me and — well, I married him. He knew nothing about the team."

Her voice trailed off in a hoarse whisper and she asked for a drink. A dozen flasks were waved toward her. From the one she accepted, Nell Kleath pulled deeply, as a thirsty man might have done. She coughed.

"I haven't talked so much for a long time," she remarked, grimly. "It makes you dry."

"Proceed," said his Lordship, sternly.

"After I married Chris, it was easy to 'work.' I could always find out where our safes had been sold, then Cully and I went on and ripped them. I didn't waste time over little jobs, neither did we attempt

too big ones, which would make a splash in the press. I used to tell Chris I was visiting some relative or other.

"It wasn't so much getting the money," she broke off to muse. "Chris made a good salary and was more than generous. It was the fun of doing it, that got me. Besides — when you have known that sort of excitement, it's hard to give it up and become a tame cat. I am older than Chris by a good deal," she confessed. "Of course you mightn't think it — regular hours and the good wholesome grub I have been eating for over nine years may have helped to preserve me." Her voice was full of bitterness. "Anyway, it looked as though I'd have to be the tame cat soon enough and I went for the fun while the going was good."

She shifted her position and leaned against the front of the box.

"We shipped a safe to a big lumber concern in Cincinnati, and the boys went on to find out when it would be full of cash pending the payment of their employees. They sent me a wire and I went on . . . 'to visit an old aunt.'"

"We were caught red-handed, Cully and I. We were tried and convicted before we could turn around — ten years' sentence. Joe Leroy, the

skunk, helped to send us up and saved his own hide — damn him!" She cursed like a man, deaf to the severe reproof from the Judge.

"I thought it was funny Chris didn't show up at the trial. It wouldn't have been funny for any other man; it would have been natural for most of 'em to wash their hands of such as I. But Chris, you see —" she glanced at the dock for the first time, and looked quickly away — "was a sort of extraordinary fellow, and I kind of expected him to come!

"The reason he didn't was because he had met with an accident — and was in the hospital with concussion of the brain. Didn't know anything about me for weeks. Out of his head most of the time, and, when he wasn't, there was no one from the factory who cared about telling him. As soon as he did find out, however, he took the first train to me — I was glad to see him," she added simply.

"'Course, there wasn't anything he could do for me — but God, he was good! Give me another drink . . ." she called, harshly, covering her emotional lapse.

"Where was I? Oh, yes. . . . He came to see me at the 'Pen.' Instead of divorcing me and leaving me to worry out the rest of my life as best I could, he said he'd stick to me closer than ever

now — this was the very time I needed him. Of course, he was a fool, but it sounded good to hear that kind of a fool talk. He said he would go somewhere and make a home for me, where I wouldn't be known and where we could start over again.

"He wrote me regularly and sent me money. Every letter would be the last, I thought. He seemed to travel all over the country, now working at one job, now at another. Never at his own, though. At last, he took up the linotype — got on some big paper in New York and was there several months. Next I heard from him was in San Francisco, on a paper there. Then came a letter from this place.

"I never heard from him without getting a fright, expecting to see that he had divorced me, or was going to. Any other man would. . . . I grew fond of that home idea, in a place where people wouldn't know my record. I just lived for the day of my release, when I could go back to Ch —

"Well, anyway," she broke off, harshly, "I got out six months before my time and started west meaning to surprise him. My money didn't last half as long as I thought it would, and by the time I got to White Horse, I had only enough for lodging and a few meals. So I tramped in.

"Got to a road house one afternoon and it empty. Too tired to take another step I crawled in to rest. Hadn't been there long when up a buggy and a man got out. The buggy drove More afraid of being told I couldn't stay than anything else, I hid, but on peeping out I nearly died of amazement, when I saw that the man was Joe Roy!

"I kept out of sight. I don't know why, except that you get into the habit of keeping mum in this place where I've been living lately. You look nervous and don't say much. I saw Joe go upstairs and heard him do a lot of scraping and hammering. Then he came down, whistled for the buggy and must have been somewhere about, and drove off. When I took a look around, I found he'd fitted the door with *three locks*, and had boarded up the window.

" 'Looks funny,' thought I. 'I'll hang around.'

"Next day, as I was walking back to Bull's Gate for food, I met the stage. Who was the first person my eyes lighted on? You've guessed — Cully! He was right pleased to notice that he looked just about as pinched and white as I do. 'Another good conduct release,' I said to myself. 'But queer that he should be making for Dawson!'

She drained the flask and wiped her mouth on her sleeve.

"Will you let me sit down?" she asked, and collapsed into the box.

Again confusion reigned while the woman was reviving, and again Judge Clayson threatened to clear the room. At last, however, Nell Kleath's voice throbbed over the heads of the silent crowd as she took up her story.

"I began to worry about Chris. It seemed more than an accident that Joe Leroy should be here, and that Cully Conrad should be here — even if neither of them knew that Chris was in Dawson. I couldn't help thinking they had a game on hand, and I wanted to get into town that night. But I couldn't. . . . I lay down on the floor in the road house and slept, soundly. . . . That was the night of Wednesday, the eighteenth of March," she said, and paused.

Some one stepped on a creaking board, and a woman screamed.

"Well," snapped his lordship, impatiently, "Well?"

"A noise woke me. It was about midnight, I judge. A covered buggy had stopped at the door and a girl got out. Her hands were bound behind her. She was followed by Cully Conrad and a very

fat boy. Between them they dragged some one who might have been doped, upstairs. There was a good deal of scraping with locks, and Cully and the boy came back, got into the buggy and drove away.

"I crept upstairs and listened. The girl was crying. Then all of a sudden I heard her say — 'Chris' — oh, Chris.' Honestly, my heart stopped beating. Could it have been *my* Chris they were dragging upstairs? And why was he locked in that room with the girl whose hands were bound and who did nothing but cry? It would take me a week to tell you all that I thought. I wondered whether his letters to me had been full of deception, whether there was another woman, and whether he expected to shake me when I got out. . . . I wondered — well, no matter, you don't want to hear that.

"I could have picked them out, but I didn't. I kept mum, and watched, and listened and did not make any noise. Pretty soon, I heard picking on the other side of the door. At that I could have sworn it *was* my Chris, but still I said nothing. In the dawn, he came out. If I had seen him make love to that girl, I would have killed him!"

She controlled herself, quickly, and went on. . .
"I couldn't get a line on what Cully and Joe had done with the kidnapping, even after I had heard he

talk to the girl. He asked her not to tell. He promised he would not. . . . By God, you men . . . he has kept his promise . . . and what's more, let me tell you, he has stuck to *me!*"

She laughed with unpleasant, shrill triumph and looked straight into Goldie's eyes. "He has stuck to me," she repeated, "although to do it meant he'd have to compromise the girl or serve a term. It isn't every woman who can hold a man that way," she thickly boasted.

A wave of wild cheering broke from the crowd — cheering which the Judge did not seek to quell. His stern face seemed to have taken on less harsh lines. But he raised his hand as though to enjoin silence and Nell Kleath went on,

"She walked off with her yellow head in the air — and her heart under her feet, I'll wager. And Chris, after flinging a stone at the window, started off in the opposite direction. Still I didn't show myself. I didn't want to, just then . . . somehow.

"I followed the girl to Dawson. I learned about the robbery. Then it was as plain as day to me — that kidnapping of Joe's.

"I came here this morning expecting that white-faced little coward" — she pointed an accusing finger direct at Goldie — "to clear him — but she's dumb.

She must know as well as I do, that Joe Lei Cully Conrad pulled this thing off —"

A gun barked from somewhere in the rear woman flung up her hands and made a g noise. Her mouth rapidly filled with a crimson which she spat out upon the floor.

"One of 'em's got me," she gasped, and forward out of the box.

Duke withdrew his hand from his smoking dropped from the window and started to run mind was fixed upon a certain loose board floor of his cabin. But from the court room suddenly came a roar which sounded like the of many hungry beasts, and the air about him filled with bits of whistling lead. . . .

CHAPTER XVIII

Timothy Meadows sat in quilted majesty at the open door of his cabin. He looked very much like Old King Cole, who had exchanged his crown for a bandage and his royal robes for a quantity of Indian blankets. Beside him was a glass of his own whiskey — unadulterated — and his teeth gnawed fretfully upon the stem of a discolored old corncob.

But the resemblance went no farther. Merriment was conspicuously absent; in fact, Meadows showed the effects of mental stress in a much greater degree than the physical encounter of recent date.

He stared out into the brilliant spring sunshine with no appreciation of its beauty and its warmth. He listened to the terrific roar of the Yukon River without the feeling of welcome "sourdoughs" always gave to summer. He was grappling with a problem. He was thinking of Goldie and for the first time in nineteen years his thoughts of her were not tinged with pleasure and pride.

On the contrary!

He had fought his way through a delirium of drunken miners with hairy throats and an armful of Goldie, back to consciousness and the quiet of his own cabin — a quiet so heavy that it held the suggestion of disaster.

"Gosh," was Meadows's first rational thought, "am Oi *dead*, at all, at all?"

He had opened his eyes, fearfully, dreading the sight which might await them, and was inordinately relieved to discover, not the roof of a coffin, but the ceiling of his own cabin. Thereupon, he had drawn a long, sighing breath. His glance had travelled slowly over the room until it rested on the figure of a woman sitting near the window. From where he lay, her profile only came within his vision, but upon that was stamped the heaviest tragedy he had ever seen. He was awed by it, he was ashamed at having inadvertently stumbled upon something so sacred, so divine. Had he been able to put his thoughts into words, he would have said that he felt he had usurped the right of God in looking at a soul laid bare.

The woman's face was drawn and ghastly white. Her eyes, wide-open and staring, were troubled and dark. She sat perfectly still, scarcely seeming to breathe.

Another veil lifted from Meadows's foggy mind. He gave a little gasp of surprise. The woman was Goldie.

"Begorra," he said to himself, "Oi must have come damned near to croakin'!"

He turned slightly, thinking the movement would attract her attention, but she did not stir. She might have been chiselled out of stone.

"Darter, darlint," he said, amazed at the weakness of his voice.

Then she had turned toward him, slowly, a stranger to the Goldie who had so frequently welcomed his recovery with spontaneous demonstration of joyous relief. And, presently, she smiled as she came to him, but the smile was out of place so near her eyes. It was as though some one had cut the mouth from Comedy and had pasted it on the mask of Tragedy.

"Feel better, Dad?" she said.

He was not only better, he was well, Tim declared with affectionate vehemence. There was no further cause for worry. She must get out in the sunshine so that the roses would bloom again in her cheeks, the shadows fade from her eyes and the droop from her lips. "Ye nade a bit av a spree, acushla," he had teased, "some wan to make ye laugh an' fergit

ye have a Daddy. Where's Kleath? Will he up to-day?"

She — she didn't — er — think so . . . Her manner struck him as being peculiar. He probed the subject further with the querulousness of a semi-invalid. Why didn't she know? Hadn't she said when he would drop in again to make inquiries? Didn't he come often, anyhow, to see how they were getting on — to ask if he could be of assistance? What the devil did she mean by saying she didn't think so?

Then, bit by bit, he had dragged the story from her — the kidnapping, her promise to Kleath, her oath to her, his arrest, the trial, her silence. . . .

"Good God, Goldie," shouted Meadows, "d'you mane to tell me ye would see the man go to jail if he want av sp'akin'? Where is he now?"

She faltered on. There was his wife — who was his wife? *Kleath's* wife? He couldn't believe Kleath had a wife! She had cleared him, and Duke had shot her, only to be riddled with bullets himself when he tried to make a get-away. Haynes had returned the money and was awaiting his trial. Mrs. Kleath had been buried several days ago, but Kleath had not been to the cabin. Her voice trailed off in a sobbing whisper.

"Been to the — he hasn't been —" Meadows raised himself to a sitting posture and spoke with bitter violence. "What did ye expect he would do? Come whinin' to the back dure loike a dog who licks the bones some other dog has thrown away? Goldie Meadows, ye are me own flesh an' blood, an' Oi've done me best in a pore man's way to train ye up in the way ye should go, but will ye tell me, honest now, what in the name av hiven makes ye think he iver *would* come to the cabin — afther this? Do ye *expect* him?"

She shook her head.

"That's what makes it so hard, Dad. He will never understand."

"Understand what?" Meadows roared. "That a gur-rul whose mother was the bravest lady in County Galway, who faced hardship an' poverty an' the disinherittance av her family — fer they thought it a disgrace fer a Fitzgerald to marry the loikes av me — was too big a coward to spake a wur-rud an' prove his innocence? Maybe ye'll be afther hopin' he'll think ye the only, original Christian, k'apin' so rigorous-loike to yer promise?"

"Oh, Dad, for God's sake, don't! You torture me!"

Meadows's hand fell heavily on her shoulder she crouched at his bedside.

"An' what do ye think ye do to me? Do think Oi'm reel contented an' comfortable know what Dawson must think av ye? Ye've b brought up in a country av strong loves an' stre hates . . . ye've seen min commit murdher fer woman they wanted; ye've seen wimen go to H fer a man . . . an' yet ye kape yer mouth shet . Goldie Meadows, tell me the truth, as if ye v talkin' direct to Saint Pather, do ye love Ch Kleath?"

The crimson wave which dyed her face and n answered him. He groaned, "I suppose ye was writ up in the papers?"

She did not deny it.

"Tell me this, now, would ye have cleared ti bye before he left the dock or not? The tru gur-rul . . ."

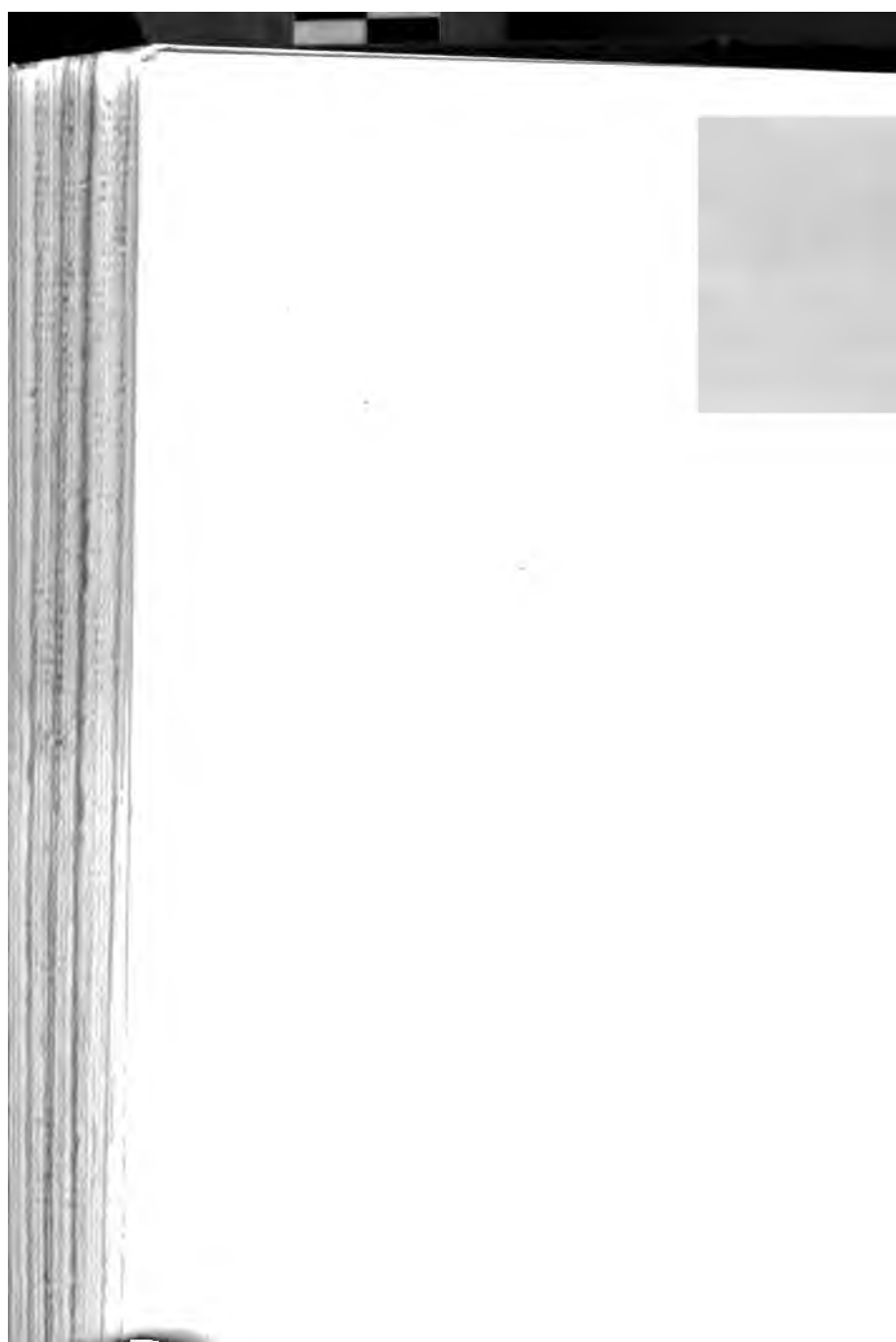
"Yes — yes! Oh, Dad, a thousand times y I did call out, but no one heard me. Besides, it v too late."

Meadows grunted. "Does he know that?"

"No one knows, not even Lizzie. They th me all you say . . . perhaps I am, only everythi looked different at the time."



Meadows's hand fell heavily on her shoulder as she crouched
at his bedside



“What do ye mane?”

“Well, in the first place, I kept waiting — I was comforted by a hope that he knew what he was doing better than he appeared. He knew so much. I kept waiting for some flaw in the testimony of the witnesses. It did not seem possible that an innocent man could be convicted upon circumstantial evidence . . . such a man of such a crime!”

Her words rushed out torrent-like.

“And later — I was influenced by a conviction that he had a reason — a better reason than the ignoble one I had imputed to him, that morning at the road house — for asking me to keep silent. Suppose by speaking, I had played into Duke’s hand? Suppose in some way I could not understand, I had made things worse for Chris? He once told me the story of a play called ‘Nathan Hale.’ . . . Nathan Hale had fallen into the hands of his enemies, and, if his identity were proven, he would be hanged. They laid a trap for him . . . they brought the girl who loved him to the house where he was a prisoner. They thought she would cry out her joy at seeing him, and in that way betray him. But he managed to warn her not to recognize him. He did not say why — he just told her. Do you see, how, in my silly, stupid way, I applied that case to

mine? In the play everything went well, and he was on the verge of escape, owing to her carrying out his wishes, when an old servant rushed in and called his name. . . . How could I tell, Dad? I am ignorant. . . . I don't know anything — except what Chris has taught me!"

She buried her face in the blankets and sobbed tearlessly. The hand Meadows laid on her head was gentle.

"No, mavourneen, ye haven't had a chanct. . . . Oi'm to blame. What can ye be expected to know, brought up with the loikes av such as me?"

She caught his hand and laid her cheek upon it.

"You are the best father in the world," she said, "and you must understand . . . all that I have told you is nothing compared to my real reason for not speaking. That was a fear for Chris, himself! The boys would have lynched him, if he hadn't made things right with me. Do you remember when Al Fenton left poor little Birdie Bains, and some of the boys followed him all the way to 'Frisco' to bring him back and punish him? Do you think they would have taken the difference in our two cases into their consideration? Not a bit, and you know it. I had been shut up all night with him in a road house — that was all they would consider. Each one, per-

haps, believing in his chivalry toward me, would suspect that some one else might not, and demand that he offer me his name."

Meadows broke into the rush of words which poured over him to suggest,

"He would have told — about his wife."

"How could I know that . . . even admitting you are right. All I understood was that rather than offer me his name, he would go to New Westminster — if he lived. I pictured him at the mercy of a furious mob; I saw him refusing to give in to them. But most vividly of all, Dad, I saw your two hands searching about the bed clothes, wringing corners of the blanket when, in your raving, you thought you had a throat between them. I saw Chris's neck in your grasp . . . I believed you would kill him . . ."

"Gosh!" muttered Meadows, slowly. "Oi begin to see — you thought he just nachelly didn't care fer you . . . yes . . . yes. . . . The compromising situation . . . the insult in refusing to make it right with ye — Shure, an' between us, the byes an' mesilf would have killed him. . . ."

"Then, Dad, you do understand — a little?"

He would not commit himself, however. He stubbornly maintained that she should have spoken.

He was not convinced that an ignorance of subsequent revelations provided adequate excuse for silence. He knew that Dawson would agree with him and his pride suffered.

Since that morning, Meadows had rehearsed the scene until he knew it by heart. He had probed Goldie mercilessly, until he was convinced that stark fear for Kleath's life had terrified her into silence. He even readjusted his opinion of her, and gave her a modicum of grudging sympathy. But his problem remained — how could he make Dawson look upon her act with lenient eyes? How could the thing be explained to Kleath?

"It ain't as though a colyum loike that could be put in the noospaper," he complained into his glass. "An' it ain't as though Oi could invite a boonch av people here an' give Goldie a chanct to make her little spiel. Certain it is too," he bit hard on the stem of his pipe, "that Oi can't chase around an' hand out the only true an' re-liaible version av the affair mesilf, fer that would look as if Oi thought folks was *bound* to blame her. Shure, an' if Barney McCool was only aloive, the whole story, entoire, could be circulated as thorough-loike as the atmos-

phere, itsilf. Gosh, but Oi'm sorry that pore bye is dead."

From Barney, Tim's mind naturally flew back to Kleath and he found himself playing with a thought which throbbed insistently and would not be ignored.

"Oi've just got to see Chris," he decided, at last, "even if Oi do nuthin' more than thank him fer the way he behaved to Goldie — fer the sacrifice he was goin' to make fer me little gur-rul. Maybe — afther Oi've talked to him a bit — maybe —"

Meadows made his preparations for the street with feverish haste, fearing every moment to be caught by Goldie on her return from the purchase of supplies. He cursed the slowness of his movements and the wobbling state of his limbs as he skirted the back streets in an endeavor to reach a certain inconspicuous spot where he would be protected by a fence and where he could anticipate Kleath's home-coming from the plant.

He had not long to wait. Kleath wheeled round at the sound of his name and grasped Meadows's hand in a cordial clasp.

"I *am* glad to see you about again, Tim," he said. "How are you feeling?"

"Shure, an' Oi may recover, but Oi'll niver be the same," answered the other, with an awkward attempt

to appear at ease. Then from force of habit, "ye have a dhrop on the house?"

"Are you going down to the 'Hall'?"

"Such was my intintion," lied Meadows, g

He stole a glance at his companion. His was pale and tired-looking. His eyes had strained appearance one sees in persons who t bear pain without flinching. His gait was not n so get-to-the-point as it had been the first Meadows had seen him. He walked as th trying not to drag his feet.

They spoke of casual, inconsequential things seated in the little office behind the "Hall," said with considerable emotion,

"Oi want to thank ye, Chris, fer the courtes showed to Goldie. Shure, an' it isn't ivery who would have gone to jail, rather than save hide. Belave me, bye, whin Oi tells ye, Oi ap ciate it."

Kleath rose and walked about the small r "It was nothing," he said, shortly. "The fact I was called upon to do nothing but sit still an acquitted, robs me of any heroism you good Dav folk try to fasten upon me."

"That ain't the idea, at all, at all," arg Meadows, with great earnestness. "Iveryt

knows what ye was prepared to 'do — an' that's where the hee-ro act comes in. But what's eatin' me, Chris, is that nobody knows why Goldie kept her mouth shet an' they think av that gur-rul as a sl'akin', little coward."

"No! No!" cried Kleath.

"Av coorse. Why not? Ain't that your opinion?"

Over Kleath's face a flush of anger spread. His eyes narrowed and became harsh and cold.

"You speak like that about your own daughter?" he demanded. "Damn me, Tim Meadows, but I have half a mind to thrash you!"

Meadows tried not to show his exultation. Kleath, then, bore Goldie no grudge, no ill-will. In some inexplicable manner he understood and approved of her action! Respect for the dead, perhaps, was his only reason for not coming to the cabin, as was his custom.

"She thinks it is," he muttered. "It's that that's makin' her the ghost av hersilf, it is."

Kleath got to his feet. He pushed the half-empty tumbler away.

"Will you tell her," he asked, "that nothing is farther from my thoughts?"

"Shure, an' Oi have told her, but she won't

belave me! Oi say, Chris," he suggested, "would ye think about tellin' her yersilf? "

Kleath hesitated a moment, then consented. They left the "Hall" together, the younger man preoccupied with his thoughts that he did not know what the older one saw — Goldie crossing the bridge and turning along the river front to the "Domingo." She walked with her head bowed so she did not see the two men.

Meadows did some rapid thinking and decided to take a chance.

"Chris!" he said, suddenly. "Shure, an' I'm makin' a matin' ye didn't drive out av me head the very thing. Oi went to the 'Hall' fer! Oi wonder — would ye moind stheppin' back to the office, lookin' in the cupboard an' fetchin' me that bottle av peroxide. Bein' as this is me fur-rust perigrination, so to speak. Oi don't relish the prospect of too much exercise. Annyway, Oi can tell Goldie ye are comin', if ye don't overtake me."

Kleath hurried through the bar, into the passage and burst into the little room.

"Good God," he said, and stopped on the threshold.

Goldie was crouched on the floor in a tempest of weeping, mingling her tears with a dark brown stain.

which marked the spot where he had fallen under Haynes's lead pipe.

All the words he meant to say to her went from him. He did just what he had sworn a hundred times he would never permit himself to do. He seized her in his arms, crushed her to him and kissed her over and over again.

"Then you don't hate me — you don't hate me," she murmured as she clung to him.

"I hate myself," he said, presently, and put her from him. "I am weak, spineless, a coward. I knew I ought to go out of your life without seeing you again, yet I have hung around Dawson these last few days in the hope of getting even a glimpse of you in the distance. I know I am not fit to breathe the same air you breathe, yet I have dared to take you in my arms and kiss your lips. I won't ask you to forgive me — for I know that in your divine goodness to all the trampled-down maggots of humanity, you find it easy to forgive. But I will take comfort in knowing you can forget the blots I have brought into your life . . ."

"Chris!" The cry was wrenched from the very depths of her being. "I don't know what you mean! I don't know — if you feel like this — why you did not come to me . . ."

"Come to you? Because I knew I was weak. Have I not proved it? Because I dared not trust myself. Was I not right? Because I still have sufficient respect for myself to hate to trade upon your pity for me. In your heart, you must shrink from me. You must loathe my deceit. You must see, as I do, now, that even loyalty to the unhappy girl who was my wife, is no excuse for having dragged you into the cursed tangle of my life. . . . Don't speak kindly to me. I couldn't bear it. . . . I am too weak. . . . But believe, Goldie, if ever a man spoke the truth, that I would rather have served ten terms in the penitentiary than have brought a single care to you!"

"Chris," she asked, "do you love me?"

He turned roughly away.

"Don't play with me," he muttered.

"I'm not. Will you take me away — somewhere in the great 'Outside' to a place where we are not known, and where we can begin again?"

He looked at her without speaking, the light of a fierce temptation in his eyes.

"Do you understand why I did not say the word which would clear you? Do you realize that I was afraid not only of Dawson's opinion of you, but actually for your life?"

He nodded vehemently, and she went on,

"Do you know what the people say of me . . . and do you think I care so long as you know the truth?"

"Don't encourage my weakness," he cried, clinching his fists. "Don't make a worm of me."

"Do you think I care what people may say about you and your connection with — with — the life that is past? Is that what you are afraid of?"

"Worse. You might be confused with — how can I possibly say it without disloyalty —?"

"With the woman, who after all gave up her life for you, my dearest? That would, indeed, be an honor. I say it in all humility, Chris."

She came to him timidly, and laid her hands against his breast.

"I should think," she said, "you would hesitate, now, to let me try to fill — her place. But I will try so hard — if you will let me . . ."

He resisted a moment. Then, with a low cry his arms folded round her.

"Oh, Goldie, woman-of-mine," he breathed against her lips, "how you turn misery into joy, darkness into light, Dawson into Paradise . . ."

.

The day which has no night shimmered over Dawson.

Although hilarity was at its zenith in the "San Domingo," Tim Meadows sat outside the "Hall," a copy of the *Yukon World* in his hand. Its most interesting item was a marriage notice, and this he had read until he knew it by heart.

He blew his nose loudly and brought the front feet of his chair to the ground with a thud.

"Gosh, but it's lonely," he muttered, rising. "Seems as if Oi just couldn't live without Goldie. But Oi musn't complain. . . . Dawson ain't no place fer a woman!"

THE END











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